

BOOK TWO

Silent Faces at the Races **John Armstrong Walker**

Contents

- 1 A Day at the Races
- 2 Characters before and after lunch
- 3 The First of five races
- 4 Second race
- 5 Third race
- 6 Fourth race
- 7 Final race

Also appearing at the Races

Pearly people

Arty Party Gals

The New Jalopies

Being Being people

Flash and Dash people

Film Star Floorwalkers (Privileged people)

People of the Shining Glass Experience

Credit Creation people

Flunky Millionaires

The Devil's Bankers

The Wrong-ones

The MindMad

1 A Day at the Races

‘Hey Wullie, what do they call them again those people who rob us every time we come racing?’

‘The Devil’s Bankers,’ replied Wullie in a strange tone.

After they had exchanged glances, Wullie pointed towards a tall man in a long dark coat, who was just about to enter the friendly seaside racetrack, ‘Look there’s one there,’ he said in an indifferent tone.

Silent Faces at the Races, well I admit it’s different, but you must understand Silent Faces are everywhere. Some in fact you may recognise in your mind’s eye, when they say something to you, as they move around in the past, present or future.

However, today I am pleased to tell you that two of them - that’s me, Lawrence, and my friend Brian - have come racing, and we are certainly looking forward to it.

‘Isn’t that right, Brian?’

‘Yes, that’s right Lawrence.’

Every year at the Glasgow Fair a race meeting takes place towards the end of July. The race meeting first took place, I believe, many years ago, although I’m not exactly sure when - let’s just say it started sometime before all that modern counterfeit stuff came on the scene like: telephones, TV’s, computers and videos.

After going in through the main turnstile my Silent Face friend and I walked around the racecourse for a few minutes. ‘I think it is going to be an interesting day today, Lawrence. I think something is going to happen. I can feel it in my bones,’ he said, as we both looked along a lime green racetrack for the first time.

I agreed with him, and was just about to say so, when my eye caught sight of a seaside jazz quartet, dressed up in old-fashioned bathing costumes. The band was playing in front of the main

stand. Brian's favourite music, in the Silent scene, is jazz, and when he heard the band playing he started running towards them, shouting, 'Brilliant!' and left me standing all alone by the rails at the racetrack.

The quartet played mainly old-fashioned jazz tunes. One of the songs I recognised was Sentimental Gentleman From Georgia, and when the singer - who was a fat chap - got to the words, "Gee I like to see you looking swell," he rubbed his big fat beer belly, and the little crowd all around him started to laugh.

The Seaside Quartet - for that was their name - played really good music, and we promised ourselves that we would come back and see them later - that is after we had visited the Ticktack bar. Brian gave the bar this name.

Brian, you must understand, is not only mad about music. No, he is also an art-entrepreneur: that is someone in the Silent scene who likes to give names to places. You see art transcends legal matters in the Silent scene. In life, knowing what is called something one day changes to something else the next day, Silent Faces tend to give names to places so that they will never change - clever, eh.

Inside the Ticktack Bar, Brian ordered two bottles of ice-cold beer. 'No problem,' replied the big barman, who had a cheery red face.

Our friend the big barman I must say looked the part. The bartender wore a blue and red striped shirt, and he had on a smart pair of dinner suit trousers, held up by thin clip-on black braces. 'There you are young Silent Faces,' he said, as he quickly got two bottles of beer out of the fridge, and poured them into two glasses for us.

Something in our young Silent Faces must have made the big barman reminisce, for he said: 'When I was your age, you know, I was just about to join the navy and sail the seven seas.'

The big barman then nodded at our Silent Faces and, after he had muttered to himself something about how this world was some place when looked at through young eyes, he picked up a

coin from the Ticktack Bar, tossed it into the air, then he put it in his pocket.

After listening to him talk about his experiences, centred mainly in Africa and Arabia, Brian paid for the drinks. My Silent Face friend then turned to me and offered a Silent toast, 'Here's to a winning day at the races, Lawrence,' And as he clinked my glass, he gave me a wild look, as if to say: 'Goodness knows what will happen to our Silent Faces today.'

Sensing the unique occasion the big barman shouted to a woman, who was sitting on our side of the bar, 'Look, darling, some young Silent Faces have come racing. Come on over and meet them!'

I could see the woman was reading a novel titled: *Third Girl* by Agatha Christie. The woman did not move, but she looked over and smiled and wished us all the best. Then before going back to the world of Hercule Poirot, she said in a bright tone, 'Good luck, Silent Faces, I hope you win.'

Inside the Ticktack Bar, sitting in the corner, were two men. The two men were both staring at a broadsheet racing newspaper. I could see they were studying it for form - it was Wullie and his mate.

At the far end of the bar - far from us but quite near to Wullie and his mate - stood a bookmaker man, dressed in a threadbare black suit, that I guess must have been new once. The bookmaker man stood at the bar with legs astride, balancing a lordly debauched frame, as he wrote out starting prices onto a white sheet of paper that had black printed horses' names on it. For some strange reason, neither of the two opposing factions looked at each other, not even I may add when a man came into the Ticktack Bar and cried, 'Look at those prices! Is it any wonder the public can't win any money these days!'

The bookmaker man knew the voice all right, and he slowly turned round and said in a posh voice, 'Ah, it is yourself, Mr Shanks. What can I get you to drink, old boy?'

Mr Shanks replied in a sharp tone, 'You should know by this time.'

After a drink was bought for a friend, the two men started talking about a man named Briggs, who had apparently won a fortune at Newcastle last week. 'They say it was well over a million quid,' reported the bookmaker man's friend, before whistling a sound to accompany outrageous luck.

The bookmaker man, in-between talking to his friend, shouted, 'Pie and beans, luv!'

The big barman's wife who was, by this time behind the Ticktack Bar, washing glasses and generally getting things prepared for the busy day ahead, looked at her husband as if to say, 'He's got a cheek.' Then she snapped back at the bookmaker man, 'Just you wait your turn!'

I noticed she said this even though there was no one else waiting to be served. The bookmaker man never stirred and, after conveying to his friend that he had heard quite a few reports about the big win down south, he once more started to write down starting prices onto the sheet of white paper, that was lying in front of him, on top of the Ticktack Bar.

After a few moments the big barman's wife took a pie out of the oven, and placed it on a plain white paper plate and, as she walked by our Silent Faces, she whispered, 'Never run after these types, Silent Faces, they would have you running after them all day long,' and she made a funny face at us.

When the barmaid got to the end of the Ticktack Bar she pushed the paper plate towards the bookmaker man as if he had a social disease, 'Right there you are,' she said sharply, then she walked straight back to the other end of the Ticktack Bar.

Behind the bookmaker man and his friend, I could see Wullie and his mate still hard at work; they were talking to each other now about what horses they thought would win, and what horses they thought would lose.

'Do you think it can carry the extra five pounds?' asked Wullie, as he tapped his little red and white pen on the table in front of him.

‘No trouble at all,’ answered his mate, who quickly added, ‘I tell you that’s the banker to beat the Devil’s Bankers,’ and the two men laughed.

The Ticktack Bar, as you can see is a strange little haunt, that I will describe as traditionally Scottish in design and detail. There are two sections to the bar that mirror each other, and three pillars that separate them; and although it is quite quiet at the moment, soon the paying public will be streaming in here and - like the bookmaker man, and Wullie and his friend - the talk will no doubt be all about horses and the possible fortunes to be won by putting money on them.

Brian and I always felt at home in bars like this, and we stood there for a time and observed the punters. The punters, mostly men, would come into the bar, buy their drinks, then settle for a chat somewhere. Silent Faces, you must understand, can look at people without being noticed; however having said that, when a couple of stable lads came into the bar, and ordered pints of real ale - while the pints were being poured - the younger of the two, a lad of about sixteen who had close cropped blond hair parted in a side shed, looked over at us. He must have noticed our Silent Faces staring at him, for he nudged his mate and said rather anxiously, ‘Look Billy, Silent Faces.’

His mate Billy - who had his back to us - turned round, and when he saw us, he said calmly to his friend, ‘Silent Faces are the latest thing in the twenty-first century; they are easily identified by the robes they wear. In fact, they say their robes can change colour in the light.’

After he said this, the two young stable lads seemed to relax, and as they drank their pints of real ale, that made their faces glow, they chatted about what was happening in the racing industry at the moment. ‘She may be a Guineas horse, rather than a Derby hopeful,’ said Billy, with a look and a nod beyond his years.

A man in managerial tweeds, not long after this, joined the young stable lads. He too ordered a pint of real ale, and after a few moments I noticed they got quite excited and started using phrases

like: each way, odds on, can't win, can't stay, won't stay, by a neck, by a length, not trying, doesn't like the going, doesn't like the course, carrying a bit much, a bit green, a bit old, a Pony, a Yankee, a Trixie, and many more horsey expressions that quite frankly baffled me.

Moments later, however, they stopped laughing; for the man in managerial tweeds brought the stable lads back down to earth with a bang. He said to them in a serious voice, 'In my opinion you will be hard pushed to catch a winner here today, lads.'

The man in managerial tweeds noticed his friends were worried, and he quickly joked with them maintaining that the only cert here today at the race meeting was a horse called Dirty Carpets: because it had never been beaten.

As the young stable lads laughed, he told them a story, that he said he had first heard when he had worked in the print trade many years ago in Glasgow: 'It's true, I tell you, every year at the Glasgow Fair a man would set out from his home, not far from the city centre of Glasgow, with his wife and kids, and they would head down to the coast for their holidays; and every year when they got to Central Station the man would say to his wife: "Right pet you and the kids just wait over there by the taxi rank. I'm just going over to the bookmakers to put my holiday bet on - I won't be long."

'The man disappeared for well over an hour, and when he did finally reappear he had to tell his wife that they would all have to go back home now: for all the holiday money had been lost on beaten favourites.'

'No way!' cried the young stable lad with the blond hair. 'I've never heard anything like that before in my life,' said the other stable lad.

'Yes, it's true,' said the man in managerial tweeds, who quickly added, 'gambling is a terrible thing when it gets into your soul. It brings you down, and you will do the lowest things just to get money to gamble with.'

Brian, I could see had heard every word of the tragic tale, and he gave me one of his long silent looks that said he wanted to forget everything he had just heard.

‘Life can be hard for those in the losers enclosure of life,’ was his unspoken quotation.

And as if to chase away the tragic tale, about the man from the print trade my Silent Face friend turned away from the stable lads and the man in managerial tweeds. He then put his hand inside his robe and, from an inside pocket of his lightweight suit, brought out a small video recorder. Brian then started to trace out what seemed to be a fantastic world around him.

After a second or two, Brian said whimsically, ‘Don't you know, Lawrence, I have just been contracted by a major film company to shoot a film titled: *A Day at the Races*.’ Then after he had fidgeted with the focus button, he declared, ‘Film is a fantastic thing.’

However, I noticed that it wasn't until he came across the TV in the Ticktack Bar, that he rushed back to me and a real world, saying, ‘Oh, sorry, Lawrence, do you want to have a look?’

So, I took the gadget in hand and searched through it till I found the gantry of the Ticktack Bar, where many coloured bottles and mirrors seemed to reflect each other. Then to my surprise, I found the face of the big barman (he was making a face like a madman at me), and also behind him on the Ticktack Bar on TV, I could see a woman in a lemon dress who was trying to sell some wonderful washing-up liquid, that she said would revolutionise the twenty-first century. It was unreal.

‘Yes, film to film is extraordinary,’ I admitted, and handed the daft thing back to him.

As time went by in the Ticktack Bar more drinks were passed over the counter for more people, and with silent philosophical wisdom my Silent Face friend, Brian, wondered aloud as to why we humans huddle together in bars like this and celebrate the way we do.

Remembering a poet's words, I told him: ‘*That which before us lies in daily life, Is the prime wisdom.*’ (Milton)

When I quoted this to my Silent Face friend Brian, he just nodded and with a smile suggested that Milton must have been some man. Brian, as you can see, has a great way of dismissing writers of the past; as far as he is concerned, they all belong to another era, and have no place in our new time. But I must say I liked the quotation, and as I thought a little more about it I looked around at the faces inside the Ticktack Bar, and it suddenly hit me that we humans at all times must want to abstract ourselves from the common world that will somehow or other not let us go.

Seeing the need for some entertainment, Brian whistled the Silent Faces anthem. And it came as no surprise to me when he brought out, from inside a pocket of his lightweight suit under his robe, a ruler sized keyboard that had little speakers on each side of it. Technology is unbelievable in the 21st century. And as Brian started to play the melody tiny little coloured lights flashed as to what harmony notes should be played. Then he sang the first verse: 'We the Silent Faces have come to stare.'

Some of the customers looked over when they heard the music, but no one seemed to mind, and soon everyone went back to chatting about horses, betting, jockeys and trainers. Just like the two chaps next to us at the Ticktack Bar: 'Don't tell me about horses!' shouted a red-faced white-haired man at his friend.

In fact, the red-faced white-haired man got so upset that after he ordered another drink, more angry words followed: 'Listen don't tell me about horses, I've lost a fortune on them,' he said in a voice, that sounded happy to be arrogant.

His friend, who had thick brushed back dark hair and a middle-aged kind of female face, laughed and reminded him about all the tips he had given him over the years; then before he looked into the mirror behind the Ticktack Bar, he smiled to himself.

The man with the red face did not say anything else and, after a few minutes went by, the other man tried to annoy him again. Laughing, he quoted a British writer, born in France, to the red-faced white-haired man: *'Lord Hippo suffered fearful loss By putting*

money on a horse Which he believed, if it were pressed, Would run far faster than the rest.' (Hilaire Belloc)

The next time I looked at the white-haired red-faced man, I noticed that he drank back his whisky as if it were the very stuff that kept him alive. Suddenly, he brushed by our Silent Faces saying to himself something about having to put on bets for some people he worked with. And as he pushed by me I got the distinct impression that life for the gambling man is essentially a self-spun tragedy, where he gets caught up in his own illusion.

'He's always like that,' his friend said, when he noticed our Silent Faces stare at him.

Brian smiled at the man who spoke, however just as he was about to say something to the man, he noticed that someone had left a paperback novel on top of the Ticktack Bar; seeing no one was bothering about it, Brian picked it up and started to read it. As he looked back at the front cover, he said the obvious thing to himself, 'Someone must have left it here, eh.'

The paperback novel - the type you see on sale at every airport and train station all over the world - was a bestseller titled: *Predestination is not a Trick*, by Adrian Slavanovitch, who the publisher claimed was the latest guru in modern-day thinking.

'How about that then!' exclaimed Brian, after he read it out loud.

And me just an ordinary Silent Face, who can sometimes translate marvellous intellectual phrases back into everyday speech, turned to my Silent Face friend Brian and said, 'What's for you won't go by you.'

Brian laughed, and as he opened the book once again - this time at the dedication page - he read in a loud voice a quotation from a suffering man:

'Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.' (Job 14:1)

After we had thought long and hard about this, I said philosophically to my friend, 'Life, Brian, is a conundrum of suffering - that's what it is.' And as I looked along the bar at the

faces of the punters, I added, 'Everyone has to suffer, that's just the way it is. That's life my Silent Face friend.'

Just then a woman came into the Ticktack Bar and asked the big barman if the Duke had been in. The big barman stopped working and, as he kicked a cardboard box under the counter, he cried, 'That rascal!' then he looked at his wife as if to say, 'You better tell him, sweetheart.'

The wife of the big barman, who was standing close by, said in a natural voice, 'I heard he's left his wife and kids, and ran away with the strippergram girl.'

There was a look here and there from one or two of the Ticktack Bar customers, as if to indicate that it would all end in tears - but it was hardly sensational stuff, in the days of our Silent Faces, and was soon forgotten about.

Presently, the woman placed her handbag on top of the Ticktack Bar, clicked it open and brought out a large white purse. She took out some coins and notes that would hopefully buy her a drink. Then without affectation she announced to everyone inside the Ticktack Bar that she would take him for every penny, 'That's what I would do,' she added in a harsh tone, then she snapped her white purse shut.

'I, you're a hard woman, Margaret,' said the big barman, in a voice that suggested that he had seen everything inside this life and the next.

I think at this point the big barman would have liked to have chatted to the woman about the man who had runaway with the strippergram girl, but there was a group of elderly ladies waiting to be served at the end of the Ticktack Bar. And as the big barman walked towards them, I noticed that he combed down some thin strands of hair on top of his bald head, as if he would soon be on parade.

'Now, what will it be ladies?' asked the big barman, before clapping two big shovel hands together.

'Vodka for the three of us,' said one of the elderly ladies, and she smiled at him.

There was certainly nothing wrong with the big barman's memory: for as he poured the vodka into three small glasses, a picture, a year old now, told him that the ladies had been here before. The big barman laughed, then cried, 'You were here last Fair, that's right - the Vodka ladies - I remember you,' then he looked at them as if to find out how the great wonder clock of time had changed them all.

'Yes, that's right, we are all back for another day out at the races,' said one of the Vodka ladies.

'That's the spirit!' cried the big barman, as he put down another glass in front of him.

And being the sort of chap who liked a sensible modicum, he poured himself a drink and, with the custom at this point quiet at the Ticktack Bar, the big barman switched on the hi-fi and out came the latest screaming jazz sounds: 'That's the latest sounds from the Absolute Zeroes,' he sang to himself.

Just to show everyone he was up-to-date with the latest sounds around, the big barman behind the Ticktack Bar danced along with the music - I think mainly for the benefit of the Vodka ladies.

Brian's favourite band, at the moment, just happened to be the Absolute Zeroes and - of course when he heard them on the radio he joined in by playing an invisible bass guitar, by banging his thumb against his chest with his right hand, while walking bass notes in midair with his left hand.

'You like the Absolute Zeroes?' asked the big barman, when he caught sight of my mad Silent Face friend, Brian.

'Brilliant,' said Brian, who quickly put away his invisible guitar, and started to chat to the big barman about one of the trendiest bands in the Silent scene at the moment.

Apparently, the big barman was some sort of jazz freak, and he told us that he had bought all sorts of jazz records - both old and new - all through his life. However, although the big barman was enjoying the music and talking to us, he was a bit on edge: because the chief controller of all sounds inside the Ticktack Bar - his wife - was looking over at him, and telling him to turn down the music.

The jazz dance, as far as the big barman understood it, was all about flapping arms and bending knees - really quite a scene. After the track from the Absolute Zeroes had finished playing on the radio, Brian, my Silent Face friend, told the big barman how he had bought the compact disc on the first day it was released, and how he has played it back to front ever since.

The big barman looked pleased, as fans do, when he heard this news. After a smile he began to look like a man-child, and he stared into space as if tumbling down a faded path all the way back to his youth and dancehall days. As the big barman gazed he muttered something to remind himself about life: 'It doesn't matter to me what happens in fashion or fads - it is all the same to me - music is music and jazz is jazz,' he proclaimed. And after whistling the Absolute Zeroes jazz tune again, he added affectionately, 'I tell you, Silent Face, when I was your age I was a jazz freak. I was into Mainstream, Bebop, Hardbop, Modal, Atmospheric, and Freefall,' and as he said this he ducked under the counter of the Ticktack Bar. Then he bopped up again singing and waving his hands about, 'All that jazz.'

Brian, the great shaker of hands in the Silent scene, told him that jazz freaks were cool, and with another lull in the custom at the Ticktack Bar, Brian and the big barman started talking serious jazz, starting with swing and ending up back where they had begun with the Absolute Zeroes.

'They say the bass player with the Absolute Zeroes is the best in the world,' reported Brian. Then he went on to mention other bands that are popular in and around the Silent scene at the moment, 'You've got to hear the Fauves, and the Legendary Greek Philosophers on the Dole,' he said out of breath.

Brian the incredible music man from the Silent scene, then started dancing again, as if someone had just turned up the volume inside his head.

The big barman caught the mood, and he too started dancing, showing off some fancy footwork that I had never seen before, 'Yea, jazz is the music to dance to all right,' he said to himself, as he twirled around behind the Ticktack Bar.

Someone in the bar, way back near one of the pillars, must have caught a glimpse of the dancing barman; for the man shouted at the big barman, telling him that he was in the wrong profession, 'You should be on the stage, big fellow!'

Then someone added dryly, 'Yea, sweeping it,' and everyone laughed.

The big barman's wife heard the cachinnation and, after giving her husband a long look, she told him to stop all his nonsense, 'Go and collect some glasses from the faraway tables,' she said brusquely.

Lucky for the barman a man right in the middle of the Ticktack Bar ordered a pint of beer, and a packet of cheese and onion flavoured crisps, and this somehow got him off the hook.

As the big barman bent down under the sink to get the crisps, his baggy trousers slipped down from his blue and red-striped shirt, and revealed to everyone, at the Ticktack Bar, the top half of a pink wobbly behind.

One of the Vodka ladies noticed this, and soon the others did too, and they all started laughing as if they had seen men do this sort of thing when they were babies. The big barman heard the women laughing and jumped up as quick as he could - which was not all that quick - and he shouted over to them, as if he had missed a joke or a funny story, 'Everything all right ladies?'

The Vodka ladies were certainly in good form now and, after another round of the clear stuff, the big barman went over and inquired about a Vodka woman's husband.

'How's big Frank, doing, Isabel?' he asked, as he leaned on top of the Ticktack Bar.

'Getting on with it,' came the sharp reply, and then some dialogue followed about the last time the two men had met.

And I tell you if you had walked into the Ticktack Bar just then you, like me, would have thought the Vodka ladies had just come from a wedding or a private function: for they were dressed up in their Sunday best. Brian and I became fascinated by them, and we listened to the ladies as they talked about their grandchildren, and about world cruises they all wanted to go on.

‘Oh, Egypt, I would love to go there,’ said one of the Vodka ladies, in a hopeful tone. She then mentioned that it could very well happen, ‘Yes, this morning, I entered a competition in the local paper, and the first prize is a trip to the Middle East.’

The big barman did not seem surprised that one of his customers had high hopes to see a land of pyramids and temples. And being a man for all occasions, he told them the following story: ‘My grandfather was in Libya during the Second World War, you know. And I remember he told me how he and his mates used to hang out of slow moving trains, and when some of the locals came up to them, saying, “Hey effendi, you want to buy some eggs,” grandfather and his mates would drop boulders into their baskets and break their eggs.’

‘Oh, that’s terrible!’ cried one of the Vodka ladies, quite upset.

‘No, it’s not,’ replied the big barman, indignantly, ‘because at the last station they had bought fags from the locals, only to discover, after the train had moved away, that the cigarette packets were full of sand.’

After he had spoken these words the big barman smiled to himself, for he remembered that the story had been told to him when he was just a youngster. One of the Vodka ladies nodded a very understanding nod, and said, ‘My dear father always talked about the Second World War. He was in the RAF, you know,’ and her eyes filled up with sweet wonderful memories.

As she slowly drifted back to the present, she must have noticed our Silent Faces staring at her inside the Ticktack Bar. ‘Oh, look it’s those funny young things in robes,’ she said, as she nudged the Vodka lady next to her. ‘What do you call them again?’

‘Silent Faces,’ said the big barman, who at once called us over, ‘come on over and meet the Vodka ladies,’ he said, and waved a big friendly hand at me.

Sensing the convivial atmosphere Brian and I walked over and introduced ourselves, and soon the superstars from the twenty-first century were answering questions about their lives in the Silent scene.

‘Sounds exciting,’ said one of the Vodka ladies, who I’m sure went through a similar phase when she was young.

We stayed for a time with the Vodka ladies, then my Silent Face friend promised the big barman that we would return to the Ticktack Bar after we had something to eat. Brian smiled and picked up his food hamper, and with his free hand he shook the big barman’s hand.

‘Right see you later, Silent Faces,’ said the big barman. Just after saying this half the big barman’s huge face creased into a wink, as if to say it was all right by him if we had lunch outside on the course, ‘You two enjoy yourselves, now - you hear.’

2 Characters before and after lunch

Near the paddock, not all that far from where the stables were situated, my Silent Face spotted some good old-fashioned toffs: Privileged People in the Silent scene. The Privileged People were all walking towards a grand building situated mysteriously behind some tall trees. I noticed that over to the right, about twenty yards away from the grand building, a path meandered through the trees from the stable area towards the racetrack.

The Privileged People all seemed to be invited to some sort of private function, or other, in the big house; for as they walked by our Silent Faces towards the trees, I noticed that they had pinned their invitations to their jackets and coats. They were telling everyone, who looked their way, that they were indeed the Privileged People off to have lunch in the big grand building at the racecourse - awfully nice.

Some people in the Silent scene call them Film Star Floor Walkers, because they remind them of the floor walkers in the big city department stores who glide around their staff to keep them on their toes. They say in the Silent scene the P.P. or the F.S.F.W. are always at the big events; I guess someone must send them invitations or phone them up: for they never miss a thing.

‘Good to see you!’

‘How are you?’

‘Keeping busy?’

‘Perfect weather for a day at the races.’

‘What!’

‘Yes, I expect I will back a few winners, today.’

‘Wouldn’t miss it for the world, old boy.’

These were some of the things the Privileged People said to each other as they headed for lunch.

My Silent Face friend with hazel brown eyes directed my gaze towards a couple of them, 'Look, Lawrence, more Privileged People,' he said and smiled.

I don't know why it is, but for some reason the Privileged People are always on edge. The first Privileged Person I looked at was a man of about fifty years of age. He had a boozy red face and was dressed up in top hat and tails, and as he glided along the path I noticed that his old-fashioned reading glasses sparkled in the sun, along with a gold chain that held them. The woman who was with him was much younger than he was. She wore a two-piece black and white suit, and as she walked by I noticed that she kept on looking round, as if half-expecting a photographer to jump out of the bushes and take a picture of her. They say in the Silent scene that no one is anyone until you have been in The National Celebrity Gazette!

It is well known in the Silent scene that Brian is a fantastic cook and a great food entertainer, and it came as no surprise to me that he had brought with him to the racetrack a food hamper. Just then my Silent Face friend stopped walking and searched for a spot for lunch. It may have been true that our Silent Faces had not been invited to the big house for lunch today, but I knew we would have just as good a lunch as the Privileged People - probably better.

When my Silent Face friend, Brian, looked about him he caught sight of a pretty young thing walking by him, 'Did you see her look at me, Lawrence?' he said in a high tone, as he raised an eyebrow.

'Pretty girls in tight dresses can never ignore a good looking Silent Face - that's for sure,' I told him with a wink.

Next to pass by was a very smart small man, dressed in a light grey suit. The man I noticed had under his arm a folded up plastic mac (a handy thing to have with you during Scottish summertime), and with every stride he took this man told me he had something to do with organising a day at the races.

Having never been to a racetrack before - and having no idea what it entailed - I stopped the small smart man, in the light grey

suit who carried the plastic mac under his arm, and asked him if he could please tell my Silent Face something about a day at the races.

‘Well, you’ve stopped the right man,’ he said proudly and, as he looked at me full in the face, he added: ‘for I am the Clerk of the Course.’

The man for a few silent seconds stared at me with light blue eyes, that I could see had already focused on the words he was about to say. Then he spoke, ‘You see that building over there, Silent Face?’

‘Yes,’ I said looking at it.

‘Well, you will soon see the jockeys come out of there for the first race. They will come along here, and they will go into the paddock area. In the paddock the jockeys will meet their respective trainers and connections. After a time a bell will ring, this will indicate to the jockeys that they should now mount, and make their way out onto the racecourse.’

The Clerk of the Course then pointed with his forefinger in the direction of the racetrack, which lay over to our left, his right; and as he looked way out yonder into the distance, I noticed his light blue eyes sadden, as if catching a glimpse of father time himself, hiding out there somewhere in the fields and trees.

In fact, his eyes made me sad, and as I stared at the fields way out yonder a melody came to me in the form of words, and I said to him: ‘Time is a dreamer, time is a day, time is a season, then time is away...’

As soon as he heard my poetic words, the man shut his eyes and laughed. Then he looked at me again and his old light blue eyes focused on my young Silent Face, and he smiled as if understanding it all, ‘This is my last Fair meeting, for I retire today,’ he said sadly, and after a pause, he added, ‘and you know, Silent Face, it really doesn’t seem like forty years have passed since I started work here.’

Brian nodded and said quietly, ‘Quite a long time, eh?’

Then the great shaker of hands from the Silent scene shook the Clerk of the Course’s hand, before adding a few words of

admiration for someone who has stayed in the same job for so long, 'Well done, that's fantastic,' conveyed my Silent Face friend.

After this Brian lifted up his food hamper - that he had temporarily placed on the ground - and showed it to the Clerk of the Course, as if to say, 'Look what we've got,' then he asked the man if he would like to join our Silent Faces for lunch.

'Oh, I would love to, Silent Face,' said the Clerk of the Course, who at that moment took out from a waistcoat pocket an old gold watch that had a long chain attached to it and, as he looked at it, he sighed and said, 'Even though it's my last day, I've still got to go to work.'

The nice man at this point paused as if to wonder about his last day at work. In a business like voice he said, 'Just over an hour and a half to go before the first race,' then he put his old gold watch away.

We said goodbye to the small smart man in the light grey suit, and watched him - for the last time - walk away into his office, over to our left, next to the weigh-in room.

Brian, after he had put the hamper back down on the grass again, searched once more for a picnic spot for lunch. 'What a nice man, Lawrence,' he said to me, in a voice that knew the secret of friendship lay in the passage:

O the bliss of those who make men friends with each other, for they shall be ranked as the sons of God. (Matthew 5:9. Wm Barclay)

'Yes,' I replied.

As our Silent Faces walked by the marquee tents we talked again about where the best place for lunch should be. The tents had been set up specially for the Fair meeting. After we had walked passed the second of the three tents, our Silent Faces came across a group of children tumbling over each other, completely lost inside a wonderful magical world of adventure and innocence.

When we reached the third marquee tent a small boy with blond hair, who was dressed in a colourful check shirt, and who had on a pair of light blue dungaree trousers, spotted us.

Suddenly, he shouted to the others, 'Look it's the Silent Faces!' and all the other children, four boys and two girls, stopped playing and stared at our Silent Faces.

Brian and I thought this quite funny, and we both wondered if the children would one day grow up and be Silent Faces, themselves. A few paces on something made me look back and search for them again; but when I turned round, they were gone. They had disappeared just like innocent childhood days of yesteryear.

'They've gone,' I said absolutely astonished.

Brian, the great food entertainer from the Silent scene, however had forgotten all about them - he had found the perfect spot for lunch. The location lay over to the left-hand side of the paddock, not all that faraway from the trees and the mansion house.

'There it is,' said Brian, indicating with a forefinger the perfect picnic spot for lunch.

When we got to the designated area, Brian opened up his food hamper and brought out a white plastic tablecloth. He then quickly started to arrange plates, knives and forks around it.

Brian's hands moved as fast as they could and, after complaining that horse racing was not as fashionable as it ought to be, he talked about the potential of the racing industry, 'I tell you, Lawrence, there is money to be made in this racing game, you know.'

'Well, I suppose there is,' I replied, not really thinking about it too much.

As I sat down on the grass, I tried to straighten out the table cloth - for it was being blown about by a strong breeze - when all of a sudden a wheezy voice behind me said in a mad accent, 'Hey you, Silent Face!'

When I looked round, I saw a whippet-faced man with a hand on a bashed soft hat, dressed in a Vandyke brown suit. 'Yea, you!' he shouted, then after the strange man had looked to the heavens, he asked me a question: 'Do you know where I can buy some tips?'

The whippet-faced man in the Vandyke brown suit quickly realised that Silent Faces are not the types to sell tips and, after another breathless laugh, he excused himself, 'Ah well, I'll just go and get myself a couple of beers at that bar over there - that's what I'll do.'

The man in the Vandyke brown suit, I think, may have been one of the MindMad. They say in the Silent scene, the MindMad drink until their minds are blank. Anyway, he trotted away from us towards the gathering crowds over by the stands, saying to himself as he went, 'It is all the same to me if no one sells me any tips at the racetrack,' and laughed a wheezy laugh as he ran.

However, when I looked back down at the white table cloth I saw a plate wonderfully decorated with food: chicken, chopped tomatoes, crinkle cut beetroot, spring onions; and lots more my eye missed because of a covering of curry sauce. I also noticed that right in the centre of the picnic table, between the two main plates, was a bottle of red wine. After a silent prayer of thanks, I said, 'Wonderful,' and picked up my knife and fork.

'Yes, Lawrence, this is the best red wine on the course,' reported a happy Silent Face across from me.

Brian poured some wine into a glass, just like a waiter does in a posh hotel and, after looking at me, he said in a la-di-da voice, 'Everything all right, sir?'

'First Class,' I said. Then I asked him, 'What type is it?'

'Chateau Each Way,' replied my friend. Then he added, 'It's a new wine, I believe, sir, from the Burgundy region.'

No doubt because of where we were Brian, in the early part of the conversation during lunch, wondered to himself, 'You know, Lawrence, I think that horses can all be traced back to one magnificent stallion, and to pick a winner one must pick a horse that most resembles that animal.'

Remembering something I had once read, and remembering too that Brian loved abstract conversation during lunch, I changed the subject to the supernatural - although it was still about horses, 'You know that they can see ghosts, don't you,' I said, as I calmly moved my fork under something edible.

‘Who can?’ asked a baffled Silent Face, from behind a chicken leg.

‘Horses can,’ I said.

‘That’s why you see them standing quite still one minute, then when something in the supernatural moves them, they rush off somewhere.’

Brian, I am afraid did not buy this, so I started talking about the close relationship between a horse and a man. I quoted: ‘*There is no secret so close as that between a rider and his horse.*’ (Robert Smith Surtees, 1803-1864).

After suggesting this to my Silent Face friend, I sat back and laughed, then I added, ‘But I guess there is no secret so close as that as between two horses - that’s for sure.’

Just as I said this we both seemed to focus on a young stable lass who was bringing out a bony chestnut colt from one of the many stables. Brian must have noticed that I had taken my eye off our lunchtime conversation; for my Silent Face friend gently slipped into the world of metaphysics. ‘Now, Lawrence, everyone knows that you are the great philosopher of the Silent scene, please tell me how horses communicate?’

‘Well, if I knew that, I would ask one of them who was going to win the first race, and put all my money on it,’ I said. However, after thinking about it more seriously, I added, ‘They must send pure sense signals, I suppose.’

After talking about this for a time, I found myself thinking about our own currency of communication: spoken words, and their meaning on the printed page. And when I moved the conversation back to humans, I said to Brian, ‘Words must have in them the truth, as well as the untruth.’

When Brian heard this he laughed and put his glass of wine down. Then he said comically, ‘There you go again, Lawrence, trying to baffle me with your very own Silent philosophy.’

Rushing to justify my spoken words, I told Brian to watch the bird, high in the sky, flying by, ‘Right, you see that bird?’

Brian looked up and, as the bird came out of the sky, he watched it land on the roof of the stable and hop along it. Then he said in a low mocking tone, 'Yes, Lawrence.'

'Well, if you did not know it's name, you would just say look at that bird, and be filled with the wonder of it all. However, if someone told you the name of the bird - in this case a magpie - the name would fill you with wonder; and your soul on hearing the spoken word of truth would be filled with joy. But if, on the other hand, they said it was a giraffe, your soul on hearing the spoken word of untruth - even if you did not realise it at the time - would be unhappy: for your soul knows everything and forgets nothing. So I put it to you my Silent Face friend: words act as a mirror reflecting the truth and the untruth, and if I have any more of this lovely wine I will not be saying mine correctly.'

Brian laughed and, with a funny face, he looked at the colour of the deep red wine in my glass.

'Sweet,' was the next word spoken by my Silent face friend. 'And you will love it, Lawrence.'

Brian stretched over and brought out of the picnic hamper a tub of Greek yogurt, and started to spoon it out into two Pyrex bowls. 'There you go, Lawrence,' he said kindly.

And as soon as the yogurt was back in the hamper out came a jar of Scottish honey from a farm in Kilbarchan. Brian poured the honey straight from the jar, and made cosmic circles on top of the creamy yogurt.

During the sweet Brian started talking about the meaning of friendship and, after some fine and interesting words, he asked me what I thought made friendship special.

'I think it is accepting your friend's failures as well as his successes,' I answered philosophically.

Just as I was about to add to this, I found myself holding up my hand against the afternoon sun to look at two strange figures who were standing in front of me. After squeezing my eyes tight, I made out two pretty young ladies who looked around twenty-one - the same age as our Silent Faces.

‘Hello, Silent Faces, would you like your fortunes told?’ said one of the sunbeam figures.

‘For we shall tell it for silver or for gold - or even a glass of wine,’ said the other one, laughing .

Seeing they were friendly looking girls I invited them to join us, and as Brian poured some wine into plastic cups for them (Silent Faces are always prepared for guests). I asked the strawberry blonde girl, who had a pale complexion that was slightly touched with rouge, what their names were.

‘I’m Cassie,’ she said in a husky voice, and with green eyes reflecting a free spirit, she smiled at me before sitting down.

The other Gypsy girl looked at me in a strange sort of way, as if to say, ‘Introductions were not necessary. In fact they were daft,’ then she too sat down.

Knowing that her friend was not all that good at meeting strangers, Cassie introduced her as Kate. Then she added cheekily, ‘She’s not really shy.’

Cassie, as she picked up her plastic cup of wine, smiled to herself. Then she said in an undertone, ‘Not when you get to know her, anyway.’

As Kate picked up her plastic cup of wine, with a chubby hand, she let her dark hair fall over her face, and for a time she stared at the outside world through one electric dark eye. Then she laughed and said in a daft voice, ‘Nice wine.’

Kate then looked at Brian as if she fancied him. And I am sure she was laughing at him after she hid herself behind her long dark hair again.

Cassie I think thought she was going to say something else, and she waited for a second, but when nothing came Cassie started talking again. ‘We noticed your Silent Faces about half an hour ago, and we would have come over earlier, but we thought it best to wait till after you had lunch.’

Her accent was strange: for it did not seem to be from any area I knew. When the gypsy girl looked deep into my eyes, I felt her on all sides of me: past, present, and future. And as we both connected and inhabited each other’s world, I felt that I could

have told her everything and anything, and still she would have asked me further questions.

Even though I guess life is the same for Gypsy girls and Silent Face boys, I felt that the world reflected different things in different ways for us; things that seemed secure to me, like: land and convention, seemed alien things to them. In fact, I could see that society had no real hold over them. Everything seemed so free and easy for them.

‘And what have you had for lunch,’ squawked Kate.

Kate, as if realising she had just spoken, quickly covered her mouth again with a chubby hand, and let her hair fall over her face. Brian I don’t think had ever met traveling girls before, and I could see he was not all that sure of Cassie and Kate; so for a time I kept the conversation going by telling them all about our lives in the Silent scene. Observing that they were always staring at our empty plates, I told Cassie and Kate that they should have come over earlier, ‘We would have shared our food with you.’

‘Yes, you should have,’ agreed Brian, who added proudly, ‘Silent Faces are like the Bedouin, in the way we treat strangers.’

Kate had never heard of the Bedouin, but she seemed to know all about the Silent scene. She talked about Silent Faces she had met in other parts of the country. As if surprised the young tearaway Gypsy girl raised her voice and observed, ‘There are so many Silent Faces around these days,’ and as she looked at her friend Cassie she laughed again.

Cassie and Kate were both dressed in casual clothes; however I did notice that they both had on very expensive shoes. The shoes I thought would have been more at home on the catwalks of Paris and Milan, rather than the fields of a racetrack; but then again I had to admit to myself that fashion has never been subject to weather conditions in the days of my Silent Face.

Thankfully, the conversation got lighter after this, and although it did not deviate much from life and all its complexities, we talked like old friends, and tried to work out what made us all what we are, and where we thought we were going in life. However, I think Cassie got a little carried away with herself when

she said that they were probably the greatest living free spirits our Silent Faces had ever met.

Brian told her about his incredible travels in the Silent scene. Then he added earnestly, 'Lawrence and I have met many different characters from all walks of life. Haven't we, Lawrence?'

After he had said this, Cassie looked up at the summer sky, slowly being filled with cirrus clouds, and I watched her eyes focus on a flock of migrating birds in a V form shape, heading south. 'You see Silent Faces,' said Cassie, as she pointed to the birds, 'when traveling people see a sign like this it makes us want to travel.'

Kate nodded in agreement and, also hypnotised by the sign in the sky, she added in a wild tone, 'Yes, it makes you want to run like the wind and hide by the sea.'

Cassie, somewhat surprised by what her friend Kate had said smiled, then as if to qualify what she meant, she quickly added, 'Everyone travels somewhere anyhow - even if it's only in their own mind.'

Kate then defended her birthright, 'I wouldn't exchange my free spirit for any career, for any man, or for any expensive house in the country.'

Cassie obviously knew what Kate was on about, but to try and help us understand what she was really saying, she added, 'You see, Silent Faces, we travel the racecourses in the summer telling fortunes, and in the autumn we work on farms, and in the winter we get jobs in bars and restaurants; but we are never in one place long enough to feel part of it.'

Cassie searched my eyes for a reaction to see if I was any the wiser about the ways of travelling girls. However, she seemed disappointed, and she turned to her friend Kate and said, 'Kate do you remember the man at Beverley last year that I said was going to win a fortune - and he did.'

Kate smiled and then looked at Brian, and then at my Silent Face. After this Cassie stared at Kate as if to bring the memory closer to her. Then she continued with the story, 'Well, do you

remember that after the race meeting he took us to a fancy restaurant and bought us champagne and salmon steaks.'

Kate remembered, 'Oh, that was a great day, and at night we went dancing and got off with a couple of lads from Norfolk - ah, they were really nice.'

This time both Kate's eyes peeped through her long dark hair, and she turned and stared at me as if she wanted to transfer images from a wonder world to a Silent soul.

The Gypsy girls said that so far this year they had been to Epsom, Doncaster, Exeter, Salisbury, Haydock, Sedgefield, Bristol and Hove, Newmarket, Ripon, Nottingham and Newbury - where they had met many friends and had told many fortunes. 'Free spirits can turn charm to money anytime they want to,' said Cassie, with a wink.

'Lawrence and I have travelled quite a bit,' rejoined Brian, and not to be outdone he mentioned six cities in Europe that we had been to recently.

The Gypsy girls for some reason had never crossed the channel, but they both said that if given the chance they would go abroad. Kate said, as she looked at the empty plates in front of her, 'Travelling is our life, and when we get enough money we're off aren't we Cass.'

The desire to travel was so certain in both their voices that it made me wonder about the basic instinct of the traveller.

The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath no where to lay his head. (Matthew 8:20.

Says the greatest traveller of them all. The following moments seemed to fall into a reverential silence. Then love the great topic of every Silent Face and travelling girl came up. Cassie asked the first question, 'Do all Silent Faces believe in love?'

'Oh yes,' I answered in a confident voice. Then I added as if unsure, 'Some people, I know, believe it to be predestined - but how can love be fated when it appears everywhere.'

Cassie and Kate both understood this and, just as Brian was about to lift his napkin to his mouth, Cassie, the strawberry blonde, took his hand and in a voice half-serious, half-daft, she said to him, 'Now, Silent Face, let me see if love lies somewhere out there in the future for you.'

There was a pregnant pause, a half-smile, then she continued, 'I see you're going to travel, Silent Face, across land and across sea; and on the very day you depart, a young lady will stand on the shore and wave goodbye to you. This is the woman you will marry when you return home.'

'Has she got blue or brown eyes!' shouted my Silent Face friend, obviously thinking about some of the girls in the Silent scene.

Cassie did not say if she had, or had not, blue or brown eyes; and with no more words for my Silent Face friend she turned and looked at me. As if in a dream she touched the side of my face with her strange fingers. Then the strange travelling girl seemed to gaze deep into my soul, and her emerald green eyes once more portrayed the mystic Gypsy words her voice spoke. 'I see a tree house in summer and sea gulls in winter. This is a story, Silent Face, of fortune and fame that will only come true after you have been defeated by love...'

And just as I was getting the picture, the young Gypsy girl's voice stopped speaking and, when I looked up from my palm, I saw Cassie and Kate running away. The runaway Gypsy girls soon disappeared into the race crowd, and Brian, who was sitting opposite me on the grass, looked at me as if the world had just been turned upside down.

As if in slow motion, my Silent Face friend stood up and started mumbling something about how life was, 'Unbelievable, bizarre, outrageous, over the top...'

'Well, they were certainly different,' I admitted, knowing fine well that it is not every day one meets such strange characters before and after lunch.

The first race was not off until two o'clock, so after some discussion with Brian, I walked over to a caravan, parked under the main stand, and bought some coffee.

When I returned I noticed Brian was still preoccupied with thoughts of travelling girls, and the things that they had said to him, 'Has the free spirit got to him?' I wondered to myself, 'and is he now about to become a travelling Romany man, and go off a wandering around the globe?'

Thankfully, for Brian a beautiful young lady dressed up in the latest fashion of the day walked by him, and her style seemed to liberate him. Brian came back to the present world with a bang, 'That's the sort of woman I will marry, Lawrence,' he said with a huge grin on his Silent Face.

The young lady in the sexy clothes unfortunately did not look over at him; however an older woman did, and when she saw us sitting on the grass, drinking coffee, over she came. 'Oh, Silent Faces, I hope I'm not interrupting your lunch, but I thought I would just come over and tell you that my daughter is a Silent Face girl, and she is such a wonderful person.'

Brian told the nice woman to sit down, and with a little wine left in the bottle, he half-filled another plastic cup, and then he handed it to her.

'Oh, really I shouldn't,' she said, before taking the cup in her hand.

The woman introduced herself as Mrs Trimby from Hamilton although she said that she had lived for most of her life in a small village not all that far from East Kilbride. Mrs Trimby told us that her husband had sadly died last year, and that is why she had gone to stay with her daughter.

'And you know, Silent Faces, when I was having breakfast this morning, I picked up the morning paper and found myself reading the racing page - a thing I rarely do - and it brought back so many memories to me of the times when Jack and I used to go to the Fair meeting. So I decided there and then that I was going to go racing today.'

‘Good for you, Mrs Trimby,’ said Brian, and rewarded the woman by cutting her a piece of Edam cheese.

‘And you know, Silent Face, I might just back a winner or two - you never know your luck.’

Her husband Jack it seemed was at one time well connected in the racing world and, when they used to go racing together, he would mix business with pleasure. Mrs Trimby talked about the difference between the then and now, and she brought the past back to life again, as if seeing it everywhere around her in the present. ‘Everybody was happy then. They would have their holiday pay, and they would come here and enjoy themselves,’ she said with a smile.

Mrs Trimby paused between the two worlds for a moment. Then she spoke again, ‘Oh, Jack and I always used to get up early in the morning for the Fair meeting, and we would get the first bus down to the coast where we would meet our friends and acquaintances. After breakfast, we would walk around the town and buy a few things. Then at midday we would all go for a pub lunch somewhere, and you know, Silent Faces, it seemed so busy then. People were always coming up to you and telling you where they had come from, and asking you if you had any tips for any of the races. In the afternoon, of course, we would make our way down to the racecourse to watch the races - it was great right enough.’

Brian’s Silent Face I could see was now full of sad reflections for a world he had never known. The great grandfather clock of time had certainly transmitted something to him.

‘Looking back at all those faces in the past is half the fun you know,’ said a thoughtful Mrs Trimby, who must have read his silent thoughts.

Listening to older people always gives great delight to Silent Faces, and even though Mrs Trimby did not stay for too long, before leaving she told us a story that she said her husband Jack always liked telling when he met his mates at the racetrack: ‘There was once these two crooked trainers who got together and decided to put a wonder drug into one of their horses, that would soon be

running in a big race somewhere. However, one of the crooked trainers switched the wonder drug to another horse (a fifty-to-one outsider running at a small track down south), and of course he put all his money on it. Needless to say, the horse won and he fled the country. Many years later, as it happened, the two crooked trainers met again at a race meeting in Australia, and the man who had been double-crossed walked up to the other man and offered to buy him a drink, "We were all a bit daft in these days," he said to his friend, and handed him a drink, "no hard feelings, eh." Not long after this the trainer who bought the drink watched the other man, who had double-crossed him many years ago, unbuckle his trousers and run towards the stands. The drink had been laced with a powerful horse laxative.'

Mrs Trimby watched our Silent Faces laugh, then she sighed, 'I, Jack always liked that one.'

Mrs Trimby finished her wine, and before she waved goodbye she said in an excited tone, 'I'll need to remember and tell my daughter, when I get home, that I met two nice young men at the races, today. She will be pleased to hear they were Silent Faces.'

When she was out of sight Brian gave me another look that, once again, confirmed the world is a wonderful place where characters turn up before and after lunch.

'Well, it's time to pack up the plates and things and put them all back into the hamper again, and head back towards the stands,' I sighed.

Brian thought it would be a good idea if he should drop the hamper off at the little cloakroom, and pick it up after the last race. As we walked away from the picnic spot, someone's face in the race crowd - or was it a colour possibly from someone's clothes - must have said something to my Silent Face friend something about Mrs Trimby's daughter. Brian said in a cool tone, 'I bet she is a good looking Silent Face girl.'

'Who?' I asked, knowing fine well what he was on about.

'Mrs Trimby's daughter.'

Then Brian added in a comic, as well as playful, tone that it was not impossible for the two of them to meet one night in one of the Silent Bars in the city.

‘You have got to have a positive outlook, Lawrence, success in love depends upon it,’ was how he put it.

The weather, the great topic of every Silent Face man and woman in the Silent scene, I must tell you is always unpredictable at this time of year. And as I looked back in the direction of the racecourse, through the arch entrance, I watched the sky quickly change from blue to grey. Suddenly, I noticed some dark clouds drifting towards us, as if from another world, and when a cold breeze blew in from outside it made me feel that the colour blue was now only in the sky, here and there, so that we could glimpse better weather conditions from some other distant land.

A man in the queue for the cloakroom, next to my friend Brian, noticed the change too. In typical fashion of someone always baffled by the weather conditions, he turned to his mate and said to him in jest, ‘If you don’t like the British weather all you have to do is wait a minute.’

His mate laughed, then agreed with him that it was always the same at the Glasgow Fair, ‘Remember last year at the Fair we had rain, sunshine, sleet - all on the same day.’

The cloakroom was just opposite the Ticktack Bar, and when it was our turn to be first in the queue, Brian popped his head in through the hatch and caught the attendant marking down “silks” in the Daily Telegraph crossword puzzle.

Brian shouted in a loud voice, ‘Is it all right if I leave my picnic hamper with you?’

The man in the dark blue sleeveless pullover, who had a little red nose, jumped up from sitting down, coughed three times, then muttered, ‘Yes, yes, that’s fine, that’s fine.’

Presently, the cloakroom man took the hamper off Brian, and placed it on the floor, not all that far away from where some old raincoats were hanging; some of the coats looked as if they had been there for years. There was surprisingly no charge for the use of this little cloakroom at the racecourse, and Brian feeling sorry

for the man in the sleeveless pullover, said to him, 'If you get hungry during the races, just help yourself to a sandwich out of the picnic hamper, anytime you want to.'

The man in the sleeveless pullover said that he would, but he looked at me as if to say: 'Is your Silent Face friend all right in the head?'

On the way back from the main building I found myself looking around at what appeared to be a sea of faces and heads, stretching right the way from the betting ring to the parade ground. And as I stared at the crowd I felt that no matter how bad the weather conditions got, it would not put the good people off from having a wonderful day out at the races.

High up above our heads swung TV cameras on top of cranes. I knew that the cameras would soon be sending signals up and down the country to the People of the Shining Glass Experience (more about them later).

'And what will the Silent Faces be backing in the first race?' Brian asked in a mad commentator's voice, as he held an invisible microphone in front of my face.

'I will be backing *Fait Accompli*,' I said.

'And why is this?'

'Because it is something already done and beyond alteration,' I assured him.

Down at the winning post we stood for a moment and gazed at where the fastest horses would soon be winning prizes to shouts and cheers from all around the course.

Not all that far away from the winning post stood a couple from the world of literature - a strange couple indeed. 'Naomi, my delight, you know how we publish books that go all around the world.'

'Yes, Peter,' said Naomi, wondering what was coming next.

'Well, can you tell me who was a horse and wrote a book?'

Peter looked pleased after he had asked this question, and as he laughed he pushed his chest out making his Ascot check jacket strain at the buttons. Then he grinned at her like a Cheshire cat.

‘You’re always asking me these kinds of things, Peter,’ said Naomi, and she cuddled up to him.

Literary people they say in the Silent scene tend to jump convention and do their own thing. With the belief that a little romance can go far in any place at any time, Peter soon found himself quoting Shakespeare to the woman he was with: *‘And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods Make heaven drowsy with harmony.’* (Shakespeare: Love’s Labour’s Lost

Naomi I would say looked around forty-five, she was dressed like a school mistress in a coloured green skirt, that had a small grey check through it, and matching jacket. As Naomi looked at her race programme she for some reason remembered a book she had read many years ago. Naomi asked Peter in a teasing voice, ‘Have you ever read about the ancient tribe who reckoned that it was lucky to bury horses alive?’

‘No, I have not,’ replied Peter astonished.

‘Funny creatures, aren’t they,’ suggested Naomi.

‘Who horses,’ replied the publisher, looking a bit lost. ‘No darling, humans,’ answered Naomi, and she stared at him as if to say, ‘Now, honey, don’t be a smart ass with me again.’

Publishing people in the days of my Silent Face, as I have said, are strange, and some people in the Silent scene say that they go through life teasing each other with obscure stories that hardly ever make sense.

Naomi looked at Peter, and Peter looked at Naomi. Then they both seemed to examine one another as if to search for strengths and weaknesses in the other’s character.

However, after a moment or two they, like everyone else around them, heard the sound of bagpipes playing the tune Hielan Laddie. The Guards band was playing at the racecourse for the first time, and as they came out onto the racetrack they got a great cheer from all the people, near and far.

‘Oh, look how smart they are darling,’ exclaimed Naomi, and she clapped her hands together three times. Then she ran like a little girl to the rails to watch them.

Peter nodded a very profound nod and, when he joined her at the rails, he told her the reason why men make themselves into soldiers ready to fight for Queen and country, 'It's a strange thing you know that makes you want to fight for your land and for your culture,' he told her. Then he pushed his chest out once more and, as the buttons and the threads on his jacket took the strain, he said pompously, 'It's in the blood, darling, a strange compulsion.'

As the publishing couple left the rails by the winning post, a strange man in a Mickey Mouse tee shirt staggered towards our Silent Faces; his face reflecting failures and fortunes wherever it looked. I whispered to Brian, as he got closer, 'I think he may be one of the MindMad.'

'Oh, love me, it's the Silent Faces,' said the man in the Mickey Mouse tee shirt, who immediately opened a can of beer, cursed the world, then proceeded to tell us all about his tragic life. 'When I was your age, I was an idealistic young man, married with two kids, I was. Then she started seeing someone else, and I took to drink. I lost my wife; my friends all deserted me. I buried my mother; I buried my father. I joined the army and went abroad. And when I returned home, I promised myself I would be teetotal for the rest of my life. However, after about a year, I just decided to become an everyday alcoholic - that'll do me, I said to myself.'

The man in the Mickey Mouse tee shirt made a strange gurgling sound before cursing the world again. He reflected for a moment or two, then he laughed at how it had all turned out.

Like all good Silent Faces we listened to him for a time, but as he spoke I sensed a strange nightmare world all around him. Dark forces seemed to have a grip on him, and they would not let him go. The man in the Mickey Mouse tee shirt, strange as it sounds, seemed happy to be on a hell bent course of destruction.

'Who gives a monkey's toss,' were his departing words, to our Silent Faces.

Brian and I looked at each other, but we did not say anything. We walked on and soon found ourselves back at the grandstand, and there we came upon the Seaside Quartet once more. As we

listened to the band it suddenly hit me, 'Yes, jazz music is so happy and sad at the same time.'

'What's that Lawrence?' murmured Brian.

It must be that polyphonic, syncopated rhythm, that makes it lazy and crisp,' I commented.

'Well, if you say so, Lawrence,' said my Silent Face friend.

Brian, as you know by this time, is a great jazz fan. In fact, Brian has learnt the art of how to dance and talk jazz at the same time - not an easy thing to do, I can assure you.

'Just listen to that funky beat,' he said to me, as he bopped up and down to the Seaside Quartet.

After listening to a few more tunes, we walked back towards the main stand and went inside the complex, and stood not all that far away from the door of the Ticktack Bar. Brian noticed the man in the cloakroom, opposite the bar, had still not finished the Telegraph crossword.

'Are you all right in there?' shouted Brian, as he stuck his head through the little hatch, once again.

The man jumped up at once, as if someone had shouted fire; but when he saw it was only my Silent Face friend, Brian, he relaxed, and said, 'Have you marked your card yet, young Silent Face?' then he wondered if it was the picnic hamper Brian was after, 'Shall I get it for you.'

'No, no, it's all right,' repeated my Silent Face friend.

Apparently, the cloakroom attendant had got the job at the racetrack, after the bank - where he had worked every day of his life since leaving school - laid off everyone over the age forty-five. The cloakroom attendant looked at my Silent Face, and then sighed at how silly some people can get in the world of business, 'Some big city guru came down to the coast and took a dislike to people born before a certain date,' he said in a wearisome tone.

I was just about to ask him if he thought it was because of the greedy shareholders that the situation had come about, when an old spinster-looking aunt handed in her raincoat.

'I would keep it handy, dear, if I were you,' suggested the man, inside the little cloakroom.

Outside the little cloakroom, Brian smiled at me. Then he returned to his favourite subject, 'Have you bought any good CD's lately, Lawrence?'

When I said I had not, Brian added, 'Well, I tell you, Lawrence, the best band around at the moment - apart from the Absolute Zeroes - are the Mannequins of Style.'

Brian then went on to describe the CD cover in such detail, that I wondered if he could see a poster of it somewhere on the wall of the racecourse.

'There are four mannequins in different colours and, at the back of them, the band are standing in exactly the same pose as the models. The Mannequins of Style are dressed in funky coloured business suits: blue and green, red and yellow, orange and lemon, brown and black - it's fabulous. And the band have dedicated their songs on the CD to all the oppressed people in the world.'

After a pause and a look to his right, in the direction of the little cloakroom, my Silent Face friend declared, 'Lawrence, do you know that many years ago the black slaves used to do a shuffling dance thing around their chains, as they sang songs about freedom and liberty.'

As Brian told me more about the band, and more about the songs on the CD, he started to shuffle dance, and say things to himself like: 'Brilliant, unbelievable, far out, funky...'

He whistled a tune to me, before saying, 'I tell you, Lawrence, this band are going to be huge.' Then he added confidently, 'I tell you, Lawrence, you will soon hear all about them in the Silent scene.'

Brian, while still doing the shuffling dance thing, looked at me as if he wanted to emphasise something, but he fell off balance and nearly bumped into the old spinster aunt who was passing by on her way back from the cloakroom.

'Get out of my way,' she said, and swung her brolly at him.

'Oh, sorry,' said Brian, who paused for a moment to look genuinely penitent.

When she had gone he carried on with the shuffling dance thing; however, when a group of men came walking by they noticed my far-out friend dancing, and one of them said, 'I think that Silent Face has been in the Ticktack Bar too long,' and they all started laughing at him.

They called the bar by another name, but I'm sure you know what I mean. Thankfully, my Silent Face friend brought the shuffling dance thing to a close, and he stood beside me for a time shaking his head from side to side, as if the musical notes from the song - he had just told me about - would turn to water and fall to the racecourse floor in crotchets and quavers.

The shuffling dance may have been over for the moment, but fun with another friend was not all that far away. Catherine, a beautiful woman, four years older than me, came through the crowd and demanded to know what my Silent Face was doing at the races. 'Lawrence, what are you doing here?' she asked, then she looked at Brian as if to say, "Who the hell is this."

'Silent Faces can appear anywhere,' I told her.

Then before I kissed her beautiful cheek I looked at her closely and I noticed the smile of a friend slowly move across her face. Catherine's sister I met many years ago at school, and over the years she is someone who, before and after marriage, has remained close to me - even though we hardly see each other these days. I will say of all the women I have known, Catherine has turned more heads than any other. Her beauty is a beauty backed with love, and one look of love from her dark shining eyes is enough to reassure you that everything is all right in this mad bad world that is full of fear and uncertainty - this is indeed a rare quality in the days of my Silent Face. She has a magical sense of humour too, and she makes me laugh every time I think of some of the things she has said to me. I remember seeing her home one time (she was not married then), and as we got out of the taxi, she told the driver to remember my face - just in case I was a murderer - what a woman. And when she kissed me again she told me that she was thinking of another, and when I asked how life had treated

her so far, she replied by saying that she had won a fight at school and had never looked back. Then she kissed me again.

Catherine, like a mother teasing a little child, said to Brian, 'Was that you dancing?' then waited for a reaction.

Brian, as he looked at her with an embarrassed expression on his Silent Face, mumbled something to her about how the shuffling dance thing was all about freedom and liberty.

Catherine laughed and said, 'What are you young Silent Faces like these days.' Then after looking up and down Brian's robe, that had slightly changed colour in the light, she added, 'You dress weird, in clothes that can change colour in the light, and you have fantastic ideas about all sorts of things.'

Catherine then smiled at me as if to say, 'You know what I mean, Lawrence, I'm not old-fashioned, but I like things normal, and traditional.'

Out of the blue, she asked us how we were going to pick our horses, and when we said we had no idea she laughed. However, after this her mood suddenly changed, and she told us that she had come to the races to meet Tom. 'But he's not arrived yet,' she said, somewhat annoyed.

After looking around at the faces in the crowd, in front of the main stand and over at the Private Members' section, Catherine relaxed and reported to us that it was here, on this very racetrack, a year ago to the very day, that Tom had proposed to her. This was news to me: for I did not know she had married again. What a day it was: for they had both decided to celebrate the great event by backing horses whose names empathised with family or friends. And they won a fortune. Let's see there was: Uncle Paddy, Charlie the Chaplain, Gosh it's Carol, Queen Katrina, and one or two others she couldn't remember.

Catherine, seeing we were a little overcome by how fast events can change, quickly reassured us that life was for the living, and just to prove it she told us: 'Later on tonight Tom and I will be jetting off to Lloret De Mar to see some friends there.'

After telling us this Catherine seemed to fall into a dream, and something told me that she was thinking of something else.

Just then, she looked up to the cloudy sky for a few seconds as if to retrieve a forgotten fact. Then she murmured to herself, 'I bet he's gone for a holiday drink with some of his friends from work.'

Not long after this Catherine stormed off - not of course before saying that she would be telling her sister that she had bumped into two of her friends at the racetrack.

'And one of them was doing - what do you call it again - oh yes, the shuffling dance thing.'

When she had gone Brian looked at me, then he mocked Catherine's voice, 'Later on tonight Tom and I will be jetting off to Lloret De Mar to see some friends there.'

As if one bizarre image in life leads to another bizarre image in life, Brian started telling me about how just last week he had been to an opera with an Arty Party Gal. Arty Party Gals, in the Silent scene, are predominantly art students who take life so seriously that even art has ceased to be fun.

Even though I could not see my Silent Face friend with a girl at the opera, I said, 'So what did you see?'

'It was a strange thing called Tristan und Isolde, by someone called Wagner,' said Brian, who pulled a face to indicate that it had been a really weird experience.

Looking as if he was still trying to figure out what the opera was all about, I thought I would quote from the world of literature again to see if it would help him: 'Old customs need not necessarily be evil.' (Anthony Trollope 1815-1882: The Warden)

'I know,' said Brian, who thereafter got all tangled up, then he added, 'You just can't tell what people are like these days,' then his face fell halfway between a growl and a smile.

Brian then admitted that he could not understand why art from another time, and an Arty Party Gal, had so upset him. 'The whole thing was unbelievable, Lawrence. Even you would not have understood it.'

'What was it about?' I asked again.

'Oh, I don't know it was something about ill-fated love, overwhelming passions, a sea of pains and troubles, and all that operatic stuff like: sickly love, despair and redemption.'

‘You won’t be going back to another opera in a hurry, will you?’ I asked him tentatively.

Brian did not answer this question; instead, full of anger, he replied, ‘You know the type, Lawrence, they bring all the world’s problems to your door: the homeless, the underprivileged, and they tell you about artists who are destined to create wonderful works of art that will benefit humanity, but for some reason they are forgotten about, and they look at you as if it’s all your fault.’

After this outburst Brian looked at me as if he had said something wrong. He looked as if he was now, for the first time, caught up in a world of many contradictions. I tried to empathise with him by saying that Arty Party Gals, in the days of our Silent Faces, are sometimes hard to deal with.

‘But Brian, my friend, you must try and show some understanding for another groups point of view.’

‘I know, Lawrence, but you know what she said to me?’

‘No,’ I said, wondering what was coming next.

‘She said that it was only social conditioning by men that made the man the head of the household.’

Brian, at this point, looked as freaked out as I guess he had when she had said this to him. With anger in his voice, he added, ‘And when I protested, saying that it was not true, she opened the opera programme and pointed to the words, ‘the stubborn knight’, and said that’s what I was.’

The more I heard about this young Arty Party Gal, the more bizarre it became. Apparently, she had once went along to one of the entertainment centres in the city, with a male friend to watch a movie (I’m not sure if he was an Arty Party Guy or not), and she made him stay right to the end and read all the credits on the screen: “If these people have taken the time to work on the film, then the least we can do is read their names on the big screen,” she said to him, as they sat all alone in the stalls.

‘Now that’s pretty far out - even by Arty Party standards,’ said a baffled Silent Face beside me.

But the best was kept till last. The young Arty Party Gal was fascinated by a thing called psychological love: a strange thing

where love is played out only in the mind until it naturally dies, 'Wild, eh!' cried Brian.

In the next breath, however, Brian told me that he thought it was all a lot of nonsense, and the reason for the nonsense was simple she fancied him.

'I tell you Lawrence even though all this madness was going on, I still got the vibe - if you know what I mean,' said an optimistic Silent Face friend.

'I mean who has ever heard of psychological love, anyway.'

Knowing Brian pretty well, I thought it wise to settle him down with a coffee. So with our black-garbed clothes flapping in the gentle breeze, we the latest movement from the twenty-first century headed across the racecourse towards one of the little cafe bars. And inside the little cafe bar, after ordering two coffees, we soon found ourselves some seats by the French windows.

Brian, still preoccupied with the Arty Party Gal, asked me if I would draft a letter to her explaining his thoughts: 'You know, Lawrence, you're good at that sort of thing. Something that will clear the air, and get rid of all that pretentious Arty Party rubbish.'

Always ready for this sort of thing, I brought out a pen and a piece of paper, from inside my lightweight suit, and after a few moments I started to write:

Dear Isolde,

I would really like to see you again, but my friends in the Silent scene say that psychological love will get us nowhere. So can we please change it to physical love - it will be much more interesting, and as time goes by, and we get older, I suppose we can change it to Platonic love - if you really want to.

Love, Tristan.

Ps: What I am trying to say is that more love and less mind-games will make my Silent Face happy.

I couldn't stop laughing as I pushed the piece of paper back over to Brian.

‘Oh, very funny, Lawrence, that would really do it, right enough,’ he exclaimed, before crumpling up the billet-doux, and throwing it into a bin nearby.

Wondering why he was so upset, I suggested to him, that he should telephone her from the racetrack, ‘You never know, you may well get on better second time around.’ Then after a nod in the direction of the mobile phone at the bar, I added, ‘Or take her to a jazz concert in the Silent scene.’

Brian looked around him at the people in the little cafe bar, as if they too had all gone through similar experiences with Arty Party Gals, and a thing called psychological love. Then he replied tersely, ‘She’s not jazzy, Lawrence.’

Sitting in the little cafe bar, with his back to us was an artist man; he was painting a picture of the paddock through the main cafe bar window. I wasn’t exactly sure what it was that was exciting him. So, I stretched my neck and looked outside the window, and there I saw a pretty girl in a summer dress, and just as I was about to draw the attention of my Silent Face friend towards her, the artist yelled, ‘Bloody idiot!’ and ran outside shaking his fist, as if someone had just stolen the picture plane.

The eight or nine in the little cafe bar by the paddock all burst out laughing. One man who was standing at the bar drinking a bottle of beer - and who I thought looked a bit like Popeye - turned to one of his mates, and said in a solemn voice, ‘I told you the mad artist man is wired to the moon,’ and everyone around the bar cheered again.

Brian and I watched through the window of the cafe bar the mad artist man get a hold of a young man who had stopped to chat up the pretty model. Someone inside the cafe bar said in a serious tone again that the mad artist man was just out of the loony bin, and may well kill the young man. Then after this a wise looking man dressed in a ministerial grey suit sitting near us, who had just ordered a pot of Earl Grey tea, turned towards our Silent Faces and warned us in a cultured voice, ‘Don’t let him catch you laughing, Silent Faces, he’s right on the edge, that one.’

The mad artist, who wore a black cape and pink trousers, repositioned the model, then he came back into the cafe bar like a bull in a china shop, and went straight back to his painting, and thankfully the therapy of art calmed him down.

‘Praise be to God for art,’ I said to Brian.

Just then two attractive young ladies around twenty-one came into the little cafe bar by the paddock, and started to give away free cigarettes. I recognized the two young ladies from the Silent scene, although I had never met them before. When they arrived over at our table, one of them said, ‘Would you like to try a Capital cigarette, Silent Face?’

I noticed from the badge on her lapel that her name was Kirsty. Brian quickly introduced himself to Kirsty’s friend, Kim. Needless to say our Silent Faces soon fell for the cigarette sellers, and we asked them if they would like to join us for the rest of the day.

‘We would love to,’ said Kirsty, then she added quickly, ‘but we are working.’

However, the cigarette sellers both sat down beside us for a minute, and we were soon talking like all the young people do in the Silent scene.

Kim a redheaded rangy girl of Scots and Irish descent said that I reminded her of someone she had once been close to. I replied that there was no crime in seeing someone in someone else. Then I offered to buy a packet of cigarettes from her.

‘Oh, there’s no need for any money,’ said Kim with a wink. ‘They’re free.’

Brian looking for something to say complimented their Victorian style outfits, ‘Your outfits are fantastic,’ then as he touched the sleeve of Kirsty’s regal blue jacket, he asked, ‘Where did you get them?’

Kirsty replied proudly, ‘They were made by no other than Lou Emanuel,’ and she swished a dark ponytail, as a fashion sign for I guess those in fashion who know who Lou Emanuel is.

The young ladies, dressed in Victorian costumes, who were promoting Capital cigarettes unfortunately had to get back to

work. However, they left us with a leaflet saying that if we could name three countries in Europe where Capital cigarettes were on sale, we could soon be on our way to the South of France - all expenses paid.

‘Maybe we will see you later, Silent Faces,’ said Kirsty with a smile.

I noticed, as the cigarette sellers made their way out of the little cafe by the paddock, they were stopped by a man in a working class bunnet. The man in the working class bunnet stared at them for a few seconds. Then in a tipsy voice he cried, ‘The world is your oyster, girls, until you discover kisses!’

Then full of charm, and full of drink, he pushed his lips together and waited to be kissed. The two young ladies, dressed in Victorian costumes, slipped by him and laughed. The wee man in the working class bunnet turned to someone who was going out of the bar and, as if mystified by what had just happened, he took off his bunnet, scratched his bald head, then he simply said, ‘Well, it used to work.’

To cheer himself up, and possibly everyone else in the bar by the paddock, the wee man in the working class bunnet recited a poem by a working class hero: *And I’ll kiss thee yet, yet, And I’ll kiss thee o’er again; And I’ll kiss thee yet, yet, My bonie Peggy Alison.*’ (Robert Burns)

I wondered if we were going to get a few more poems from some of the characters in the bar - but sadly we never. Everything seemed a little flat after this so we finished off our drinks and headed outside, and there we enjoyed the bright sunshine that was now breaking through the dark clouds all over the ocean sky above us.

On the way out of the cafe bar, Brian talked non-stop, however when he paused, I said to my Silent Face friend, in a very matter of fact way, ‘I think I will give Kirsty a phone next week and ask her out for a drink.’

A surprised Silent Face looked at me. Then he asked in a serious voice, ‘How do you know her number?’

‘The company name was on the badge next to her name,’ I answered nonchalantly.

‘Oh,’ said Brian, who I think at that moment wondered why admiration for a young lady was starting to cause a little jealousy in another.

And in my imagination I saw him running to the nearest telephone trying to find out the number of Capital cigarettes, ‘Is that you, Kirsty...’

Competition, you must understand in the Silent scene, is just as fierce as any other scene. As I looked to my left, over towards the Private Members’ section, I heard once more the seaside jazz band playing their wild jazz tunes; so as promised we went back over to see them. This time we had to stand with a group of jazz fans who had gathered around them in a half-circle. I recognized the song they were playing right away. It was a favourite of mine titled: Sandstorm. The song is always being played in the jazz clubs in the Silent scene; Brian recognized it too, and he immediately started to shuffle dance - showing off some fancy footsteps to everyone around him.

The tune Sandstorm in fact reminded me of last year’s Jazz Festival. The Festival was a special tribute to all those who had died in the two World Wars. In the Silent scene, there are still some who declare that Fascism has the answer to all our problems; the extremists are forever telling us to dance to their swaying swastika tunes, and bow down to their jackboot dreams. But Silent Faces have never forgotten those who fought and gave their lives, so that we can enjoy the dance of freedom. *At the going down of the sun and in the morning We will remember them. (For the fallen, 1914-1918)*

In fact, it is Brian who organises many of the Jazz Festival events in the Silent scene and, as I watched him dance beside me, I could tell that he was probably thinking about the next Jazz Festival, right now. So it came as no surprise to me when Brian’s feet stopped dancing, and he said, ‘Lawrence for the next Jazz Festival, that should be happening in September, I’m going to ask the Mannequins of Style, and the Absolute Zeroes, to do a spot for us.’ After a pause my Silent Face friend added with a twinkle in his

eye, 'And I'm going to ask this mob here as well, the Seaside Quartet, to play for us - what do you think about that, then?'

Brian gave me a wild look as if the Seaside Quartet, with their old-fashioned bathing costumes and their wild swing music, would definitely freak out a lot of Silent Faces at the Festival.

'Great idea,' I said, but I thought it prudent to add, 'But you better wait till they have finished playing, before rushing over and inviting them to the next Jazz Festival.'

'Oh, right,' mumbled Brian.

Brian stood beside me like a trained dog waiting for its master to shout, 'Go get em boy!'

When the Seaside Quartet finally finished playing Sandstorm, Brian ran over shouting, 'Well done lads, that was absolutely brilliant,' and he started shaking hands with all the band.

The fat singer smiled as soon as Brian took his hand, and not long after this a telephone number was written on the back of a fag packet that just happened to be lying around. Brian then went on to tell the fat singer from the Seaside Quartet all about his music collection, and how he had followed the career of this or that band in the Silent scene.

The fat singer from the Seaside Quartet, however, had to get back to singing, and he told my Silent Face friend that he would be in touch with him soon. Not long after this he introduced the next song: 'This one is called Sky Blu Serenade, and it's for all you cool Silent Faces out there,' and as he turned away he laughed a little to himself.

As the tune got going, Brian started to shuffle dance once more and say things like. 'Oh, yea this is a new one, and you will love it, Lawrence,' even though I had heard it a thousand times before.

In the little half-circle crowd, listening to the band, I spotted a few New Jalopies, shaking their long hair, as the cool jazz went down. The New Jalopies, in the Silent scene, are old-fashioned heavy metal freaks who maintain that a metallic world will return

one day. "Narcotics are Cool," said the words on the tee shirt of the New Jalopy, in front of me at the racetrack.

The New Jalopies have their own scenes in the city, but sometimes they come into our bars. In fact, you have to be careful when they are around: for they are so unbalanced and uncoordinated. When the New Jalopies dance they swing their arms around and knock you out of their way, 'Yea man, you have got to lose yourself,' they say to you, as they come crashing into you on the dance floor.

However, one thing I will say in defence of the New Jalopies: they are not violent, and that is why we tolerate them in the Silent scene.

When the Seaside Quartet had finished their set, the little half-circle of fans all dispersed and, as we walked away, I wondered what the reaction would be to such an outrageous band in the Silent scene at the next Jazz Festival.

Just then a foreign looking man and his sweetheart walked arm in arm, by my Silent Face. The man stopped and spoke to my Silent Face friend Brian. The foreign man was from Athens; he had brought his lover to the racetrack for a day out. The man told us that he was into realpolitik, and was over here - in this country - trying to work out our money system. He croaked in a cultured foreign voice to my Silent Face friend, 'Hey big man, I like your dancing.'

As Brian laughed, the Greek man added in an academic way, 'It is very interesting.'

'Oh, cheers,' said Brian nonchalantly.

Brian, in a very excited state, told the couple all about his plans for the Seaside Quartet, the Absolute Zeroes, and the Mannequins of Style, as regards the next Jazz Festival in the Silent scene. The happy couple listened to him, then they said goodbye, but I don't think they were ever the same again, after seeing a Silent Face man dance the shuffle dance at the racetrack.

As is the way of life, just when things start to get mundane and boring, you invariably bump into something quite wonderful and extraordinary. Past the winning post, not all that far from the

paddock, our Silent Faces came across a handsome black man, who wore a long leather coat - that I noticed had fancy patchwork pockets on it. Standing there very still the handsome black man stared at our Silent Faces, as if before coming to the racetrack he had had some kind of premonition as regards our meeting. 'Ah, I seem to know your Silent Faces,' he said, in broken English.

After shaking hands and introducing ourselves to him, he told us that his name was Mandala Umballa, an African-Indian man, born in the Punjab, who had moved to Nigeria.

'Mandala,' I said, seeing him to be a friend of our Silent Faces, 'We are going to wander around the course and take in some of the sights. Why not join us,' and I duly pointed in the direction we were heading.

As we walked a quick assessment made me think that our new found friend was a fashion model, or even a turf dilettante: for he was very handsome indeed. But I was wrong he was actually an exporter and importer of exotic beers from all over the world. 'I sell beer to everyone,' said Mandala Umballa, with a look of amusement on his African-Indian face.

'But I tell you, Silent Faces, today I have come to the races for a special reason,' he said mysteriously, 'I will tell you later.'

The African-Indian man then told us that he had been dancing late last night in an exclusive nightclub in Glasgow. After a pause Mandala indicated that it had all been worthwhile, 'I've been chasing the ladies,' he said with a nod.

'Do you live there?' I asked him, wondering if it was from that city he had travelled from today.

Full of delight the African-Indian man shut his eyes and laughed, 'Yes, I have a flat in the city centre; I rent it from a buddy of mine. You see, Silent Face, I give him beer and he gives me cheap accommodation.'

Apparently, his beer factory - where he makes beer and stores it was in fact not all that far from where he stayed, and after telling us this, he said with audacity, 'You see, Silent Faces, I work the capitalist system during the day, and at night-time I have a good time with the ladies.'

The African-Indian man then laughed at how ridiculous the West was. Mandala, I could tell was a character all right and, as we walked along by the enclosure and parade ring, I could see he wanted to tell our Silent Faces all about himself.

‘Last year, you see, I come over from Lagos to Scotland on a business trip, and I like it so much that I stay. Back home I heard a lot about the wonder west from my friends, who had been there; but when I arrive here, I see it for myself, and I say, yes this is for Mandala Umballa. Then I get a good idea, I say to myself; I will make beer and sell it to all the pubs and clubs in town.’

Mandala paused at this point and indicated with shining eyes the pleasure he had had so far in the world of beer.

‘I tell you, Silent Faces, now I sell beer to the rich and famous all over the world.’

Brian loved this and remarked how cool our African-Indian friend looked, ‘You’re some man, Mandala,’ he said, and the great shaker of hands from the Silent scene shook the African-Indian man’s hand, once again.

The elegant man from Lagos, dressed in a long leather coat, appreciated this honour, and in no time at all he was telling us all about his life, and how he had made more money over here in six months than he could have possibly made back in Africa, in a lifetime. As he talked, I could quite clearly see that he understood the benefits of being known by rich and poor alike.

‘The good entrepreneur never discriminates,’ he told us.

On a lighter note he talked about people he had come across in the pubs and clubs of Glasgow, who took food for fashion, and cocaine to keep them up all night.

‘I tell you, Silent Faces, Mandala, he knows all the cats in the big city.’

Mandala laughed another wild laugh, but there was something in this man’s eyes that told me that he knew what he was saying was ultimately false, and something, I thought, kept pulling him back to a simple world - a time before life was a city, and the city was a snare.

Knowing the fashionable city of Glasgow quite well, our Silent Faces listened to Mandala Umballa, and nodded when he mentioned this or that place.

After a time Mandala stopped talking and he stared over my right shoulder, and I watched his dark brown eyes suddenly fall from a chaotic night world back to a day at the races.

Brian, seeing him go quiet, introduced music back into the conversation, 'Have you ever heard of the Mannequins of Style, Mandala?'

Mandala had heard of them, but he couldn't remember any of their songs. Brian whistled the tune Back in Chains, then he asked the African-Indian man if he could shuffle dance.

'What is the shuffle dance?' asked Mandala indignantly, as if my Silent Face friend was trying to pull his leg.

Brian wasted no time, and soon falling footsteps, that had been walking away from the paddock, started to shuffle dance again. Mandala howled with laughter, and as he slapped his thighs, he cried, 'He's good,' and he pointed at Brian's feet.

There was still no sign of the horses coming out for the first race yet, so I thought it a good idea if we celebrated our new friendship with a beer at the Ticktack Bar.

'Great idea,' said Brian, who went on to tell Mandala all about the strange little bar under the main stand.

However, strange as it sounds, as we headed for the drinking establishment we had given the name the Ticktack Bar to, Mandala Umballa once again told our Silent Faces that he had come to the races for a special reason. 'It is very important to me that I win today,' he said secretly, 'but I will tell you later.'

So back at the Ticktack Bar we stood once more - though this time with a foreign face friend - and once more we wondered what we should order.

'Listen, Silent Faces, if there's one thing I know - it is beer,' said the man from Lagos, and after these broken English words had been spoken, he crumpled up with laughter again, 'Oh, yes I know all about beer...'

When he eventually noticed the big barman in front of him, Mandala Umballa quickly straightened himself up, and got back to his sophisticated self. With a well-trained eye, Mandala spotted a well known American beer on the gantry, and ordered three bottles.

The big barman smiled at him, and said, 'No problem, my friend.'

'Ah, this is a good one,' said the African-Indian man, as he raised his eyebrows.

Presently, the big barman brought out three bottles from the fridge, and placed them on top of the Ticktack Bar, along with three halfpint tumblers.

As if insulted, Mandala informed the big barman in a loud voice, 'I have no need for a glass; I drink straight from the neck.'

The big barman stared at him as if completely fascinated by his cool style. A little later when Mandala had an elbow on the bar, and an empty beer bottle in his hand, he asked the big barman in a laid back way, 'Is this trendy beer a good seller in the bar?'

'It certainly is,' reported the big barman. Then he added brusquely, 'The only problem with it, my friend, is that all the trendy people from the city, when they come here, keep tearing the labels off the bottles, and they leave them all over the floor in my bar.'

Trendy people, in the days of my Silent Face, tend to be highly strung and do not know what they are doing - especially when they are not in their trendy bars.

'And it's me that's got to clean the mess up,' said an angry big barman.

The big barman then looked around to see if any trendies were in the Ticktack Bar, to show us exactly what he meant. When the big barman picked up an empty bottle of beer off the Ticktack Bar, he said in an angry voice, 'Trendy people today have got it far too easy, if you ask me.'

As our Silent Faces laughed, the big barman somehow realised that the big African-Indian man was in some way

connected with the licensing trade. 'Do you have a bar in the city, big man?' asked a cute big barman.

Mandala, however, was too quick for that, 'Who me!' he joked with him, 'No, I'm in the black market,' then the black man screamed another wild laugh.

Mandala now in full flight started to tell the big barman, and our Silent Faces, how when he was young he would go down to Lagos town and buy some bottles of beer for the tourists. 'I would get up early in the morning and go to the supermarket, and buy two crates of beer. Then I would go home, put them in my mother's fridge, and in the afternoon I would take them down to the beach and sell them for double the price. I tell you Mandala - he was a good business boy.'

Hearing he was from Lagos town, in Nigeria, the big barman got really excited and said, 'That's funny when I was your age I worked on a building site right in the middle of Lagos town,' and his eyes opened wide, as if to wander back down the sliding scale of time.

As if stranded between the present and the past, the big barman asked, Mandala, in an excited voice, 'Is the Blue Note Club still there?'

Mandala had not heard of the Blue Note Club, and it was not really surprising when you think about the different ages between the two men.

'What type of music did they play, then?' asked my music mad Silent Face friend, Brian.

Without batting an eyelid the big barman walked over to the righthand side of the bar, and he put on a CD, and out came some screaming psychedelic jazz. 'Like that,' he said and beamed.

And to complete the madness the big barman started dancing wildly, behind the Ticktack Bar, as if trying to make his old frame young again.

'It's a wild tune,' I said, as I stared at the shaking frame of the big barman.

Brian laughed and I think was about to say something about the music; but the big barman stopped dancing, and once more he

came over and started chatting to us, 'They were wild days, I tell you, I remember them well. Every night after work, I would put on my best suit and my dancing shoes, and head down town to the bars and clubs of Lagos town. The women were beautiful and the booze was cheap. What more could a young man ask for?'

His wife, who at that moment was cleaning some tumblers in a small spinning machine, knew the look on his face, and she shouted at him to turn down the music, 'Go and collect some glasses from the tables - people are waiting to be served!'

'Right pet,' replied the big barman.

And just before walking away from the bar, the big barman turned round and looked at my Silent Face, and he said in a voice, as if happy to be sad, 'And then I met the wife, and my dancing days were over.' With a sigh he seemed to forget about everything around him, and he exclaimed, 'That's what happens to you, all right.'

Not long after this, Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman from Nigeria, reminded our Silent Faces, once more, that he had come to the races for a special reason: 'It is very important for me that I win, Silent Faces,' he said, but added nothing to illuminate what it was all about.

Mandala, after saying this, lent up against the Ticktack Bar, and brought out from a fancy patchwork pocket of his long leather coat a packet of American cigarettes. He lit one. Then he gazed around the bar, as if contemplating a perfect world, and planned his future.

Brian seemed fascinated by this funky cool dude, and he studied him, from tip to toe, as if to gather information on how to act cool so that he could in the future show off to some of his friends in the Silent scene.

The bar that we have named the Ticktack Bar was getting pretty busy by this time, and everyone around us seemed to be talking about racing certainties, and what permutations would make them rich men by the end of the race meeting.

As I have said, we were not conversing very much at this point, and it made me think about what they say in the Silent

scene: that coolness is never good company. Then I cracked a joke saying that wouldn't it be funny if all the poor people won, and all the rich people lost at the races today. Then I wondered aloud, 'Do you think this would start a social revolution?'

Brian knowing me pretty well thought it wise to warn Mandala Umballa, the beer salesman, 'Watch it, Mandala, Lawrence is known as the great philosopher in the Silent scene.'

The big beer salesman laughed at this, and the ice that can sometimes gather when things are too cool thankfully melted away. Behind the Ticktack Bar the big barman heard us laughing and, after shouting to someone something about an arrangement for next week, he came over again to see how we were getting on.

'Philosopher, did I hear someone say. I tell you they've all been in here, men who said that they understood everything in life. I have seen them all.'

After saying this, the big barman winked a hard man's wink at my Silent Face friend Brian, as if to tell him it was true. Brian, of course, just like everyone else in this world has had to make his mind up about life and all its complexities, and I was not surprised when my Silent Face friend changed the subject back to music. Halfway through telling the big barman about something he had read in a jazz magazine, Brian asked him if he had the Absolute Zeroes CD behind the Ticktack Bar.

As the big barman looked for it, Brian turned to our new friend, and said in a wild voice, 'You will love this Mandala.'

The big barman's wife too seemed fascinated by the foreign man, and when she moved by him - on her way to collect some glasses from the tables in front of the bar - she stopped to talk to the tall African-Indian man. 'Where are you from?' she asked him kindly.

And when the big handsome black man said, 'Lagos lady.' She drew the parallel, and said in a wondrous voice, 'Oh, my husband worked there once.'

The big barman put another CD into the machine and just before he pressed the play button, he shouted, 'And one day I will take you back there, sweetheart!'

‘No way,’ replied his wife in an angry tone. ‘If I’m going anywhere it will be on a world cruise, and it will be on my own.’

And just to emphasise the point she wanted to make, she walked away from the bar, and into the office that was over on the other side of the Ticktack Bar.

I had never been to Africa, but to me it sounded a wonderful land full of beautiful people, like the Kikuyu and the Masai, living in a world full of superstition and fear. And as I looked at Mandala Umballa, I thought to myself, ‘Yes, Silent Faces in Africa, now that sounds like a good trip.’

Brian, as if understanding what I was thinking about, looked up and nodded that he would like to go too and, as he caught the imagery from my silent words, he asked Mandala, in a casual tone, ‘If Lawrence and I ever go to Africa, will you take us to where the good music is played?’

‘Yes, Silent Faces, I will take you there,’ said an enthusiastic Mandala Umballa, ‘and I will take you to where the good looking ladies are to be found, too.’

Mandala slapped his thighs after saying this. Then he crumpled up with laughter again, and when he finally stopped laughing he played the game that all young men love to play. He spoke in an excited manner making love thoughts lead to more love thoughts, until women appeared to be only playthings in a world of fun.

Mandala said, ‘I tell you, Silent Faces, women are just like kittens when it comes to love - all you have to do is keep them purring.’

To demonstrate what he meant Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman, raised his right hand over his left and stroked an imaginary cat.

Brian told Mandala about a kitten he had met recently, and although Brian thought the purring theory a good one, he said the secret of success with women lay in keeping them laughing.

The good fun lasted for a while then it seemed to dull a little, and just when it looked as if the lover boys had run out of things to say to each other on the opposite sex, Mandala Umballa, the

great beer salesman from Nigeria, revealed to our Silent Faces the reason why he had come to the races today.

‘Listen, Silent Faces,’ he said secretly, as his eyes popped out of his head, ‘I know I can trust you. You are not the kiss-and-tell types.’ After Mandala stopped laughing, he continued, ‘I tell you, Silent Faces, I have met this beautiful woman, and I have fallen in love with her.’

This time his spoken words made him blow out air, as if he had just run a love mile around the racetrack. I was just about to congratulate him when more broken English words produced more unbelievable images. ‘She say to me, Mandala, if you want to marry me, you will have to keep me in the style I am accustomed to. You must understand, my friends, her father he is a rich man, and they live in a big house in Newton Mearns, and inside that house they have a swimming pool designed in the shape of a champagne bottle.’

Mandala contorted his face as if to understand the rich. Then he nodded at our astonished Silent Faces, as if to say he knew we would understand him. ‘So that is why I have come racing today. I have brought with me all the money from my beer making business, and I am going to put it all on the first race, and if the horse wins, I will then put all the money on the next race, and so on till the end of the race meeting. Then I will have enough money to buy a big house for the woman I love.’

There was a long pause after this outrageous statement, then Mandala Umballa stared at our Silent Faces with mad gambling eyes. Suddenly, he laughed wildly again, then as if speaking to himself, he confirmed his thoughts: ‘I tell you, Mandala Umballa, he will win.’

Mandala was so serious about his plan that it seemed to me that only a plane crashing onto the course, or extreme weather conditions would now stop him backing horses to win a bride.

‘You’re not serious, Mandala,’ exclaimed Brian, as if realising for the first time that this was fact and not fiction.

‘Yes, I tell you, Silent Face, I will back horses to win a bride,’ replied an angry Mandala Umballa.

Then he calmed himself down with a drink of cool American beer. Now all you Silent Faces reading this I am sure will agree with me that the big African-Indian man has lost his senses. I mean there is absolutely no way a man can come to the racecourse, and win all five races - is there?

Brian and I tried to persuade our African-Indian friend not to throw away all his hard earned cash on horses - even if it was for the sake of a bride - but it all seemed in vain.

‘Yea, come on, Mandala, if this woman loves you she will take you rich or poor,’ I said, as I gently tapped him on the elbow.

‘That’s right, money can’t buy you love,’ added Brian, in a kind but serious tone.

‘But, Silent Faces, you don’t understand,’ protested Mandala. ‘She is the best looking woman I have ever seen.’

The big barman, who at this point was pouring pints of beer for some city gents who had come racing, looked up and stared at the African-Indian man. Then he glanced at his wife, and the magic of those who are one seemed to feel the same thing. He looked at her as if to confirm the theory that predestination is certainly not a trick.

A few moments later as he walked by her, behind the Ticktack Bar, the big barman whispered to his wife, ‘If he’s going to do it, he’s going to do it, and that’s all there is about it.’

Brian suggested in a calm voice, ‘Listen Mandala, why don’t you save up enough money from your beer business, and put it down as a part payment for a house.’

Mandala listened to the advice, but no reaction flickered across the African-Indian man’s face. And just when I thought he would stay silent forever, the big beer salesman in the long leather coat with the fancy patchwork pockets, cried out passionately, ‘I tell you, Silent Faces, this girl - she is fast!’

When Mandala said this he looked over at some of the city gents inside the Ticktack Bar, and, I think, he worried about his future.

‘What if a Flash and Dash man gets to her first - I will never see her again!’ he cried out fervently.

I must explain Flash and Dash people in the Silent scene are folks who dress up in the latest fashions, but have no substance to them. They sometimes appear in our Silent scene. The Flash and Dash people usually come up to our Silent Faces, say something, then dash off again, 'Must dash, see you later.'

As far as I could gather, the young lady Mandala was after was the daughter of a merchant banker from Glasgow, and she went every Friday to a club in the centre of town and, if the big beer salesman did not get hold of her soon, he was sure he would lose her to a Flash and Dash man from the city.

'He is no good, I tell you, Silent Faces, he will spend all her money on Flash and Dash things.'

Although we all laughed, Mandala looked into the mirror behind the Ticktack Bar and you know, through the bottles and glasses, I think he saw them running away together.

Brian looked at my Silent Face, and I could see that we both thought the best course of action was to try and get our African-Indian friend to change his mind, as quickly as possible.

'Come on Mandala the lady is not worth having if she's a money grabber,' I said in a stern voice.

'Yea, that's right,' added Brian, 'love and money don't mix.'

But as Mandala Umballa stood with us at the Ticktack Bar he kept quite cool, and he stared ahead of him as if the devil himself was trying to change his mind.

No one said anything after this and in a quiet moment of reflection I wondered to myself what it was that pulled people together, then pulled them apart again. Then feeling it was getting a bit out of hand, I tried to cajole the big African-Indian man with a made up maxim, I said scornfully: 'If she marries you for a house she will leave you for a mansion.'

When the big African-Indian man heard this he looked at my Silent Face long and hard. Then in a harsh tone, he replied, 'I tell you, Silent Face, Mandala Umballa, he will win all the races today at the race meeting.'

Mandala turned away from me and, out of a right hand patchwork pocket of his long leather coat, he produced a

newspaper that I could see had been folded into a perfect square. The African-Indian man then slowly opened it up at the racing section, and started to study form like a proofreader looking for errors.

The big barman behind the Ticktack Bar felt the tension, and thought it wise to mention the fact that the horses would soon be coming out for the first race.

‘Drink up lads and have a good time,’ he said, trying to help us.

Certainly, after this there was something in the air - something was definitely going to happen. The man in the long leather coat with the fancy patchwork pockets was not going to go back on his word. He was going to back horses to win a bride.

‘Well, this is it, Mandala, my man,’ said Brian, before wishing him all the best.

‘Yes, good luck, Mandala,’ I said, and raised my glass to him.

Just when our Silent Faces were about to leave the bar and go out onto the course, a man with long blonde hair, dressed like a beach bum, spotted the African-Indian man at the bar, and he came over to talk to him. The beach bum greeted the African-Indian man in the way one does when meeting a friend in a strange place: ‘Hey, Mandala, what in the world are you doing at the races?’ he cried in a happy go lucky tone.

Not long after the African-Indian man told him about the mad scheme, (of how he was going to back horses to win a bride) a young lady came to the bar, and got quickly served by the wife of the big barman. She requested two glasses of wine, and when her drinks arrived she paid for them, giving the exact money, then she clipped her purse shut, dropped it back into her shoulder bag, and lifted her drinks and turned to go.

The beach bum and Mandala may have been busy talking, but they both noticed her, and when she walked by them, the African-Indian man cried out as if singing a popular song, ‘Hey, baby, baby, baby!’ and he smiled at the pretty young thing in the summer dress.

The young lady was about to walk away without looking at them; however the beach bum with the long blonde hair (nearly as long as the young lady's) stopped her, and told her the story about the beer salesman and the young lady whose father had a house with a swimming pool in it in the shape of a champagne bottle. 'He is going to back horses to win a bride,' said the beach bum, in an animated voice.

Out of curiosity, Mandala asked the young lady if she had any tips for any of the races, 'You seem to be the horsey type, lady,' he joked.

The young lady hardly batted an eyelid, and as she looked down at the two glasses of wine in her hands, she replied, 'Lady Luck in the last race, must have a chance, I guess.'

Mandala and the beach bum both laughed, and as they repeated the horse's name to each other, the young lady walked over to the far side of the bar where an anxious man was sitting waiting for her.

Mandala and the beach bum both nodded at each other and then agreed that beautiful women were what this world was all about. The two men then both confidently predicted good results as far as the opposite sex went in the future.

'You're some man, Mandala,' said the beach bum, who thereafter told our Silent Faces about a night when the big beer salesman pulled a superstar model in a nightclub in town. 'She thought he was a famous musician,' reported the beach bum, and as he slapped the African-Indian man on the back, he added in an excited tone, 'and she was ready to run away with him - isn't that right, Mandala, my man.'

The African-Indian man laughed, then we all made our way out of the Ticktack Bar and onto the course. However, the big beer salesman in the long leather coat stopped at the doorway, as if he had just remembered something; he then told us that the man we had just met was no ordinary man. 'No, I tell you, Silent Faces - he is known in the city as a lady killer.'

Spotting the fascination in the African-Indian man's eyes, and the total respect and admiration for the reputation lady killing is

supposed to give you, I told Mandala that it was once the view of a great writer that love and knowledge, in this world, could never be considered compatible with each other: *'To be wise and love Exceeds man's might.'* (Shakespeare: Troilus and Cressida)

Mandala had never heard this before, and after a few moments he just nodded and said that all he knew was that the beach bum was a lady killer, and that he, Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman born in India and who had moved to Africa, was going to win all five races here at the racecourse today: 'Yes, soon I will have enough money to buy a big house - then I will have my bride.'

'Are you sure Mandala?' I asked him.

Mandala, as he stepped outside the Ticktack Bar, said confidently, 'I tell you, Silent Face, I will do it.'

3 The First of Five Races

It was quite a scene, for over the holiday-makers' heads and in between the punters and bystanders, money was starting to change hands at all sorts of prices: 'It's six to four, three-to-one, nine-to-two, ten-to-one, bar!' shouted a red-faced bookmaker man, who was standing right in the middle of the betting ring.

It did not take me long to see that his philosophy had no meaning at all, other than the chance to bet was the chance to win - that's all there was to it. Not far from the paddock the horses were starting to leave the parade ring, and make their way out onto the course.

Mandala, knowing that soon he would have to pick a horse to win a bride, watched them closely as they trotted up the course - in programme order - towards the starting stalls. The African-Indian man, I noticed, checked the numbers on the jockeys' backs with the printed silks in his morning newspaper. 'Number seven looks good,' he said to himself in a smooth tone, and ticked the space between its name and its form.

I suggested that we should all go down to the rails, near the winning line, and get a better view of the horses.

'Yea, you never know, we may find a winner down there,' murmured Brian to himself.

Mandala Umballa slowly folded his morning newspaper back into a perfect square, and put it back inside one of his fancy patchwork pockets of his long leather coat. After a few moments, he said slowly, 'It is a good idea.'

Mandala, as if to chase away evil spirits, I noticed walked with a slight swagger, and as he walked he stared at the faces in the race crowd just like a boxer does before he enters the ring. However, once we got to the rails, opposite the winning post, Mandala Umballa started to get nervous, and he brought out his

morning newspaper again - though this time he opened it at a news page. After reading the front page story, he cried, 'Look, Silent Faces, "Horse Dope Gang Exposed!" ' and he pointed with a long spider finger at the rogues' gallery.

Brian through a faint smile gave the impression that unfortunately these sorts of things happened in the racing world, in the days of our Silent Faces.

'Yes, it seems all too easy these days for a crooked trainer too slip into a stable, and administer a tired horse with a wonder drug,' I said, seeing the need to explain the incident to our African-Indian friend.

Brian nodded as if to agree, then he noticed a small advert on the right hand page of the paper the African-Indian man was holding. Presently, he looked at it over the big beer salesman's shoulder, then he read it out loud: 'Why not take dancing lessons, and get fit for life.'

'Why not indeed,' I said.

'I think they should have a dancing marquee tent at the race track?' said an adventurous Silent Face beside me.

Mandala loved this wild talk, and he laughed, then he said to Brian, 'I tell you, Silent Face, I would be a big hit with the ladies,' and as two large feet inside two large brown brogues started to dance, he added, 'these dancing feet, Silent Face, have been all over the world, you know.'

Of course, my Silent Face friend, Brian had to get in on the act with his shuffling dance thing, and another song from the Silent scene: Down at the Club with Chris and Gary.

Just then, an announcement came over the course saying that the horses would be soon under starter's orders, so after the dancing we all headed back in the direction of the stands, over towards the betting ring.

'Right, what are you betting, Lawrence?' asked my Silent Face friend, as he brought out some money from his suit pocket under his black robe.

I liked the name Stop and Start, and as long as the horse did not do that, I thought I was in with a chance, 'Yes, Stop and Start that's the one for me,' I told him.

Brian said that he had not made up his mind yet, and as he looked at the list of runners for the first race (Class D Maiden Stakes Race), he looked around at the punters' faces in the betting ring as if searching for vital clues that would help him.

The bookmakers themselves did not seem interested in clues. They were too busy telling the punters how good their prices were. Their philosophy went something like this: 'It's only a game, Silent Face, you pick a horse's name, give me your money, and I will give you a good price; and if you win, come back and see me, then I will pay you out the money I owe you - now what could be easier than that, eh.'

Mandala knew all this, but for some odd reason he was very particular about who he placed his bet with. The other strange and fascinating thing was that he told us that he could not say the name of the horse before it ran. He had to write the fancied name down on a piece of paper, and hand it to the bookie in the betting ring; of course if he placed his bet in one of the betting shops on the course, he would not have this problem: for there you write out your selection on a piece of paper, along side the time, the date, and the place of the meeting.

Mandala quietly told us, 'I am very superstitious. You see, I was told by an old witch, a long time ago in Africa, that if ever I was to bet, I was never to say the name of the thing the money was on. So that is why when I pick a horse's name, I will write it down, then I will give it to the good bookie.'

Unhappy with the choice of bookmakers around him Mandala decided to go wandering. 'I will find a good bookie who will give me a good price,' he said in a smooth tone, before wandering off.

Not long after this, I spotted the African-Indian beer salesman at the far end of the betting ring, writing a horse's name down onto a piece of paper, before handing it to a bookmaker man.

Mandala after placing his bet did not rejoin us, so Brian and I headed back down to the winning line where we stood in a little crowd, and there we waited for the outcome to the first of five races. However, as it happened, another of the MindMad came staggering over towards our Silent Faces saying that he had got up at the crack of dawn this morning, and so far had drank: four bottles of beer, two large whiskies, and a rum and cola.

‘It’s the Glasgow Fair!’ he cried, as he danced in front of us. Then he shouted, ‘Come on yah beauty,’ at a phantom horse making its way up the course, ‘You can do it!’

Everyone laughed and, I think like me, wondered how the staggering man would be able to transmit the phantom horse’s name to betting agency or bookmaker at the little seaside track; however it was all academic, for a man with a well-educated voice came over the course sound system, and informed everyone in a very posh Oxford English accent: ‘THEY’RE OFF!’

And as I looked way out into the distance, to an area that seemed to be a wasteland, I saw lots of colour spots move and then come together again.

The man with the well-educated voice never stopped from the off, and as the horses came round and into the straight the crowds all over the course started to cheer and shout, and everyone listened for their horse’s name. The man with the well-educated voice, at this point, became very excited indeed. In fact, I thought, at first, he had put all his money on one of the horses: ‘It’s Call and Response, from Lady Love, with Sing Sing back in third, then comes Stop and Start, then they are followed by Tailgate, Shim Sham Shimmy, Turkey Trot, and finally Daddy Rice...’

With only one hundred yards to go everyone could see there was really only two horses in it - as the man with the well-educated voice reported: ‘...it’s the favourite, Call and Response, from Lady Love, and they go by together, photo finish - what a race!’

As the horses thundered by the winning post, suddenly our friend Mandala Umballa appeared, dancing and shouting wildly.

‘Did he win, Silent Faces?’

‘Did the favourite win?’

Brian and I both shook our heads to show him that we did not know what horse’s head had crossed the line first. Then Brian suddenly realised that he was in the frame too: for he had backed Lady Love. Brian held up his betting ticket proudly, and showed it to the African-Indian man.

‘Look, Mandala,’ said the great shaker of hands from the Silent scene. Then he added gracefully, ‘May the best man win,’ and he shook the African-Indian man’s hand.

So along with the rest of the travelling punters we all wandered around for a while, and listened for the result of the Class D Maiden Stakes Race. It was quite a while before the man with the well-educated voice received official word, as to what horse’s head had crossed the line first. The result came, however, just when a man next to me was promising to turn racing terms into figures: ‘I’m going to put a monkey on Call and Response,’ he said to his mate, before running towards the bookmakers.

‘Ladies and gentlemen the result of the first race is first: number seven, Call and Response.’

After the man with the well-educated voice had announced the result a great cheer went up all over the racecourse, and Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman, started dancing wildly again. ‘Yes!’ he shouted and twirled.

The African-Indian man, who had come to bet on horses to see if he could win enough money to buy a big house for the woman he loved, had got off to the perfect start. And as he danced he slapped his thighs through his long leather coat, and jumped up and down into the air.

‘Oweeeee! I tell you, Silent Faces, Mandala Umballa will back all the winners here today, and he will marry the woman he loves!’

As I laughed, I saw Mandala meet his bride outside a church - then the silent image disappeared. When he eventually calmed down, he said something to himself about the secret value he placed upon what he called his superstitious moods. ‘If a horse’s

name does not upset me, and I do not mention its' name - then it will win,' was his baffling quotation.

Mandala then stared far away towards the other side of the racetrack, as if hypnotised by whatever it was that made him pick horses' names. After a long pause he told us again, 'I will win, Silent Faces, this I know.'

So Mandala Umballa had opened his account, and he soon walked away from us to collect his winnings from the man he called, 'his good bookie,' whose place of work was at the far end of the betting ring.

When he returned the big beer salesman told us that it would indeed be a great honour to him if he could buy oysters for everyone, and something nice to drink. With a twinkle in his eye he said furtively, 'There is a caravan parked under the main stand.'

'Yea, sounds good to me,' said Brian.

A few moments later Mandala said, 'This is it,' and we all walked up towards a large white caravan parked inside the complex area. The modern caravan had two large black boards outside it. The writing on the boards informed the passers by that here you could buy: oysters, jellied ells, periwinkles, whelks, crabs, crab claws, cockles, mussels, and clams; and if you didn't fancy any of that then you could even buy a piece of plain old-fashioned haddock, or even a chicken leg.

Mandala as good as his word bought the Silent Faces oysters, and then we all moved over to the side of the caravan and stood there for a while.

Brian, not one to be easily distracted while eating, however found himself staring at the people of the Shining Glass Experience who at this point were walking by us. They were all staring at the many TV screens that seemed to be everywhere under the main stand. 'Look at the state of them!' cried Brian, as he nodded at the strange creatures.

It was true the people of the Shining Glass Experience stared at the little TV monitors above them as they walked through the racecourse. They all seemed hypnotised by painted horses from

faraway places like: Haydock, Lingfield, Newmarket, Redcar, Wolverhampton, Worcester, Hackney and Crayford.

I must explain the People of the Shining Glass Experience, in the Silent scene, all believe that what is true in life can only be understood if it appears on a television, or film screen; it doesn't matter what the subject is: religion, sex, politics, science or sport: 'It has to be on a screen before we believe it,' is what the People of the Shining Glass Experience tell you when you meet them on the street, or anywhere else for that matter.

'Go on, get up there!' shouted a lover of the Shining Glass Experience, as he waved a blue betting slip in the air at the shining glass above him. However, most of the people of the Shining Glass Experience lost, and threw their betting slips onto the floor to join all the others destined to lie there.

Some of them I noticed brought along with them their own personal small TV sets (they are the extreme followers of the Shining Glass Experience), and were holding them in their hands as they walked by us under the main stand.

My Silent Face friend complained before swallowing a large oyster, 'You wonder why they bother coming along to the racetrack, don't you; I mean they could have easily stayed at home, or stayed in their Shining Bars in town.'

Mandala laughed at Brian. Then the African-Indian man crushed the empty carton in his hand that had once held delicious oysters. 'Now Silent Faces, I buy you something to drink.'

So we all headed back to the Ticktack Bar, and tried to catch the eye of the big barman, once more. Unfortunately, between races the Ticktack Bar was at its busiest, and we had to wait a while before we were served.

Brian, I must tell you is the type of Silent Face who does not like long silences, and as we stood there he told Mandala Umballa that he was planning to go on a world tour soon. 'That's right, Mandala my man, I'm going to go round the world next year,' he said, in a very matter of fact voice.

Mandala liked the sound of this and, being a man of the world himself, he offered my Silent Face friend some advice.

‘Always go to the big cities, places like: Amsterdam, Paris, London, and Berlin, and you will have a good time.’

After naming the above-mentioned places Mandala paused, and searched our Silent Faces to see if we understood his philosophy on travel. Then he added in a smooth tongue, ‘I tell you, Silent Faces, if you like their cities the people will like you.’

Mandala smiled, as if seeing himself abroad, then he continued, ‘And if you get in with the rich crowd you can make plenty money.’

After showing us his perfect white teeth, through another huge smile, he added cheekily, ‘No one - not even the Silent Faces - can make it abroad on their own.’

Just then the big barman came over, and right away he inquired about how the man who was backing horses to win a bride was getting on, ‘Did you win, big man?’ he asked, the big dandy in the long leather coat.

The big dandy in the long leather coat confirmed he had won, and just to prove it, from out of a right hand patchwork pocket of his long leather coat, Mandala produced a wad of notes. The big beer salesman showed the notes to the big barman, then to our Silent Faces, ‘Mandala, he is off to a flyer,’ grinned the happy punter.

Congratulations were offered on both sides of the Ticktack Bar and, as is the way with gamblers, some of the punters stared at him as if trying to search out his secret.

‘Right what will it be, champagne!’ shouted the big barman, as he clapped two big shovel hands together.

Mandala thought about it, but after a few minutes he told the big barman to keep it on ice. ‘No, just make it three beers, and something for yourself and the good lady,’ said the African-Indian man, in a calm voice.

‘Well, thank you very much,’ said a happy big barman, who promised to be the first to toast the big man, ‘all the best,’ after all the races had been won.

Without affectation the big barman opened the bottles of beer, then he started to chat to Mandala about the photo finish: 'It was a close thing, eh...'

Then for some reason the conversation landed back in the world of business, with the big barman inquiring as to what other schemes the African-Indian man was involved in.

'Oh, I used to sell wine, but I did not find it a good business, it was too elitist, too many basement bargain buyers,' said Mandala smoothly.

The African-Indian man looked at the barman, lit a cigarette, then added, 'But beer is a good business, I can go all over the world, and bring it back to Britain and sell it cheaply. There is no problem with beer here.'

Brian was not sure what he meant, and he asked him politely, 'Is the regulation for beer different abroad?'

Mandala laughed, 'There is no regulation where I go. I can drive over to a poor eastern country, pick up a cargo of beer, bring it back, then sell it for double the price, and no one says anything.'

The African-Indian man then gazed as if seeing a cargo of beer come ashore somewhere down the coast, and his eyes sparkled.

'I don't know anything about beer,' admitted my Silent Face friend Brian, 'but I do know something about wine.'

Brian then went on to educate the African-Indian man about wine, 'The most important thing to remember about wine, Mandala, is the impression it gives you before you taste it.'

Brian looked around him at the Ticktack Bar to see if anyone was drinking wine - but no one was.

Mandala for some reason at this point had a strange look on his face; it was as if Brian had just turned his world upside-down. The African-India man folded his arms to protect himself against any more mad comments from my zany Silent Face friend.

Brian thought this funny and he quickly reassured the African-Indian man what it was he was trying to say, 'If it is clear, it will be a good wine, but if it's cloudy, it will not be so good.'

Thankfully, Mandala understood what he meant and, just to prove it was all a misunderstanding, Mandala pointed to a bottle of red wine that had become almost transparent with sunlight behind the Ticktack Bar. 'This is a good one, yea,' he chuckled.

Brian waxed lyrical about wine for a time, then he changed the subject back to music, 'Mandala, do you think Indian or African music would sell well over here?'

The big African-Indian man thought about it for a second or two, then he answered him casually, 'I know you can buy some of the songs in the big stores in town.'

Mandala paused to think about what he had just said. Then he added, 'You know, many of my friends are in bands, in India and Africa.'

'Get them to send me over their demo tapes,' suggested an excited Silent Face.

Mandala could see the boy in Brian, and after smiling at him he agreed to write to some of his friends back home.

'Fantastic,' said Brian, who turned to me and started to shuffle dance again.

And as he danced Brian mumbled to himself the words from an Absolute Zeroes song. Then he suddenly stopped and said, 'I know what I'll do, I will write to some record companies in London and get them a deal, and when they come over they can all stay at my place.'

This last statement was said, of course, without any thought about how his poor mother would feed the whole rhythm section. Brian got so carried away with the wild scheme that he instructed me as to my part in the fantastic plan. 'Right, Lawrence, you can sell the tee shirts and badges at the concerts, and put up the posters so that the people in the Silent scene know all about them.'

As we stood at the Ticktack Bar wondering about all that had been said, Brian, the great shaker of hands from the Silent scene, shook the big African-Indian man's hand, and I can report to you here that some sort of musical agreement took place, inside the Ticktack Bar, in time and space at the races. 'It's a deal,' said a happy Silent Face, to an African-Indian friend.

Wondering if words could really turn to action in the future, I asked Brian and Mandala, if they had thought about what type of concert halls the bands should play in.

Just as Brian started to mention a few well known jazz haunts, in the Silent scene, a woman came up to the bar and asked the big barman where the cloakroom was.

‘It’s over there!’ shouted the big barman, above the noise of the pub.

The woman who looked around fifty, and who was dressed up as if it were Ladies Day at Royal Ascot, thanked the big barman, smiled at Mandala, and completely ignored Brian. However, with all this going on, she lost control of her black patent leather bag, and it fell to the ground, and out onto the floor tumbled, a red lipstick, a credit card, and a book titled: *With Love* by Theodora FitzGibbon.

I picked up the book, Mandala stopped the rolling lipstick, with a large brown brogue, and Brian retrieved the credit card, between the foot rail and the bar. After a few embarrassing moments, we handed back her possessions to her, in the order we had picked them up.

The woman calmly took her things from us, then she caricatured herself and said, ‘Oh, I’m so stupid; I am always going to get that bag of mine fixed,’ and then with little clicks from stiletto heels she made her way out of the Ticktack Bar towards the cloakroom.

Was it the noise from the heels of her shoes, or was it the shoes themselves, that reminded Mandala Umballa about a young lady he had recently met in town?

‘I tell you Silent Faces, on the very first day I arrive in your country, I meet this young woman in a fashionable bar in Glasgow and, after a few drinks, she say to me, “Mandala, why not come back to my place and I will show you the Rumba room.” ’ Mandala, screamed with delight, then he added, ‘I did not know she was a musical student,’ and after this he doubled up with laughter, as if being constantly hit in the solar plexus by the hand of fun. ‘I tell you she was some baby.’

Brian liked the sound of this, and he asked Mandala where he could meet these exotic types who hang around bars, and take you home.

‘If you are ever in any of the smart bars in Glasgow, Silent Faces, just ask for Mandala Umballa the great beer salesman, and you will be all right.’

Mandala looked around the Ticktack Bar cautiously. Then he casually asked about the Silent scene. He said in a quiet voice, ‘And what bars do you go to, when you go out?’

I told Mandala about some of the new bars, and about some of the late night restaurants in the Silent scene, then I offered to take him there, some time.

‘I would like that very much,’ he said in a polite voice.

Brian’s hazel eyes, I could see had caught the fascination for all things new. My Silent Face friend turned to me, no doubt remembering the first time we had visited some of the Silent Bars in the city, then he turned to Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman, and he said, ‘Mandala will love the beautiful women in the Silent scene, won’t he Lawrence!’

I agreed, then told Mandala that some of my friends in the Silent scene were organising a get-together to watch a football match on a big screen in one of the entertainment centres.

The beer salesman said full of enthusiasm, ‘Yes, I will come.’

Just at that moment Mandala noticed a piece of paper, lying on top of the Ticktack Bar, and he duly picked it up and wrote down his telephone number on it.

‘This is my office number,’ he said. Then he added with a grin, ‘You can phone me anytime; I sometimes sleep there.’

However, if we did not phone him it was no problem; for Mandala invited us to call on him during the day, and he would show us his fantastic beer business in the city. ‘I buy beer from all over the world, and every day I speak to important people on the telephone,’ he said, and nodded as if to acknowledge an invisible client somewhere.

Being someone who reads a lot, I told Mandala that one of the oldest surviving words, in the history of the human language,

was the word alcohol: 'The word can be traced back to Sumerian times, 3000 BC.'

'I think I will write to them and ask them to send me some beer,' joked Mandala Umballa, the African-Indian beer salesman.

Brian must have mentioned something to the African-Indian man about the lovely cigarette sellers, because as they came into the Ticktack Bar again, Brian winked at Mandala telling him that they were on their way.

As Kirsty came up to me, I felt my face come alive again, and it made me wonder how we humans love to steer our course in the hope that one day fortune may be a friend, and in a wonderful second the chance to love will be the chance to dream.

Kirsty opened a packet of Capital cigarettes, and as cool as you like Mandala took one. He lit it with an old-fashioned petrol lighter and, as he drew the smoke deep into his lungs, he said in a confident voice to Kim, 'It's good, very good.'

For some odd reason the attraction of the cigarette sellers seemed to lessen in the African-Indian man's eyes. It was as if attraction was only a far off thing, and when he got near to it the illusion started to fade. A few minutes later Mandala started talking to Brian about a beauty queen he had met recently in a bar in town, 'You should have seen her...'

Brian did not have any problems about seeing beauty queens here at the racetrack, or in any other place for that matter. Brian, after saying, 'Fantastic,' three times to Mandala, turned to one of the cigarette sellers, and he said, 'Listen girls, I'm going to be organising a night out for the boys soon - in a Silent Bar in town - so that means the girls can come along too. We always start off with a drink in one of our favourite haunts in town.' Then after a pause, he said in a hopeful tone, 'Fancy coming along?'

The two cigarette sellers looked at each other, then a diplomatic Kirsty, trying not to offend my Silent Face friend, Brian, said, 'Oh, we will probably bump into you somewhere later on, and you can give us your phone number then.'

When the cigarette sellers had gone we all moved over and stood in the doorway, not all that faraway from the entrance to the

Ticktack Bar. Standing there I looked outside over the course and, before taking a drink of beer, I noticed some dark clouds gathering above us in an ever changing west of Scotland sky.

Mandala also noticed the change in the weather conditions, 'This is a good omen for the next race,' he said to me, with a wild superstitious look on his handsome African-Indian face.

4 Second Race

Some Silent Faces, in the Silent scene, I know, say that in life evil can appear anywhere. Some take the view that there is nothing you can do about it: 'It's just a sign of the times. It will soon pass and be forgotten about,' I have heard them say. However, whatever shade of opinion people have as regards evil in the days of my Silent Face, they all agree that from the beginning of time there has been a movement going around this world known as the Wrong-ones.

The Wrong-ones they say in the Silent scene can come in any colour, creed, or religion. They can come from good homes or bad. They can appear dull, daft or even brilliant. All good mothers and fathers tell their children to avoid them, 'Keep clear of them,' is what my parents told me when I was a young lad. And as I grew older, like most folk, I acquired quite a lot of knowledge about how to deal with them.

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. (Luke 6:35)

I find this a very helpful quotation when I think of the Wrong-ones. It was as we stood around the betting ring listening to the wild shouts from the bookmakers, that I noticed three Wrong-ones approach us. The three of them had on scruffy jeans and bomber jackets. On first sight, I thought them to be street fighters rather than gratuitous killers. All of them had that well known look on their faces of greed and excess. Just then I remembered another biblical quotation:

These men are filled with smouldering discontent. They are in a state of chronic resentment against life. Their conduct is determined by nothing but their own desires. Their talk is insolent and arrogant. They give fulsome admiration to those out of whom they think they can get something. (Jude v 16. Wm Barclay)

As the Wrong-ones on the racetrack came forward, smiling their horrible smiles, I noticed the one nearest to me had his tartan sleeves rolled up. On his right arm, he was proudly revealing his nickname “The Poger” to everyone. His nickname was written around a thistle tattoo.

The Poger, who I took to be the leader of this horrible pack, was the first Wrong-one to speak to us. ‘Hey Sambo what are you doing at the races?’ he growled at our friend Mandala Umballa, and stared at him with beady eyes.

Mandala had no doubt come across some Wrong-ones in Africa and India, and I was glad to see him ignore them. Ignoring the Wrong-ones usually does the trick, and after a few minutes they become bored and slink off somewhere.

As we walked away, the Wrong-ones cracked jokes about Mandala’s country of origin. Then they started discussing their favourite topic: love-hate, a twisted game where the lover becomes an oppressor and all he wants to do is terrorise his victims.

‘I hope they soon become bored, and lie up against a wall somewhere, and drink their cheap cider, and gob off to each other about all the things the Wrong-ones love to talk about,’ said my Silent Face friend.

Just when I thought we had got rid of the Wrong-ones, the Poger came over and stuck his ugly face up against Mandala. 'And what are you looking at then?' he said in a bizarre voice.

'Right that's enough of that!' I shouted and pushed him off Mandala.

Brian and I then used our Silent stares (taught by holy men in the Silent scene) to ward off any evil spirits that may be hanging around. Holy men in the Silent scene say that if someone possessed by evil looks into your eyes, and they do not see, or feel, a reflection of their own wanton thoughts, they will wander away.

I have also heard it said in the Silent scene that the Wrong-ones like to look at themselves in the mirror and smile at their wicked faces. The Wrong-ones you must understand feed on fear, and I don't think our African-Indian friend quite understood this fact yet. I think he may have been in trouble if our Silent Faces had not been around; however it was not long after this, thank God, that they wandered away.

Thankfully, after about five minutes our good friend, Mandala Umballa, the African-Indian beer salesman, was back in good spirits. Mandala said boldly, 'I tell you, Silent Faces, the Wrong-ones they are no good,' and he laughed.

Our Silent Faces agreed with him, and thought it a good idea not to speak about them again. I made a comment about how busy the betting ring looked, and then cracked a joke, 'Mandala, I think your good bookie has gone into hiding - he is nowhere to be seen.'

Mandala did not say anything. The beer salesman just nodded, then lit another cigarette. Brian changed the subject back to music - what else, 'Mandala, have you heard of the Manassas Clouds?' he said full of excitement.

Mandala nodded saying he had.

'I like them; they are brilliant,' continued Brian.

My Silent Face friend then started to shuffle dance once again though this time he balanced the bass and the treble in both hands, as if playing a flyaway keyboard.

Mandala laughed and soon the conversation flowed easily, as it always does between music-lovers, and in no time at all we found ourselves at the other end of the betting ring before we knew it. Over at the right-hand side, in front of the main stand, lay the Private Members' section: an area where people from the so-called upper class are to be found. I watched one or two of them through the rails until I got bored.

Mandala must have noticed me watching them; for he said to me in a secret voice, 'You know them, Silent Face.'

'They fall into two categories, they are either Privileged People or Flunky Millionaires,' I rejoined.

Brian peeped through the railings at the people inside, and he wondered aloud if Monty Williamson was in there. 'He's a Flunky Millionaire,' Brian exclaimed, as he looked from left to right, for him.

It was well known in the Silent scene that Monty Williamson had retreated with his gains - that he had taken from the poor - into places like the Private Members' section at the racecourse, to live out a miserable life. Over the years, I have heard a lot of people in the Silent scene say that he is just a poor millionaire; others that he is a poor creature who does not believe in anything except himself.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:25)

They say in the Silent scene that someone once told the poor millionaire this, but he dismissed it.

The African-Indian man looked again at some of the faces in the Private Members' section. Then after a few moments, he said in an excited tone, 'I tell you, Silent Faces, when I have won all the money and bought a big house, and married the woman I love, I will return here next year, and you will see me - the great beer salesman - walk around the Private Members' section like a gentleman.'

Mandala stared faraway into the future, and it was only when a Flunky Millionaire in a dinner suit, shouted to someone on our side of the fence, 'Hey John, old boy, meet me before the last race in the usual place,' that Mandala Umballa seemed to come back to this world, on our side of the fence.

Some people say in the Silent scene class distinction is an imperceptible thing and it is everywhere: it is in the home, it is in the work place, it is in the queue for bread, and it is in the ranks of the unemployed. In fact, some people in the Silent scene get so fed up with the upper class, that they say to you, 'Well, if you can't beat them, why not join them.' But I don't agree with them. Every true Silent Face knows that love is the answer. You can hear it in a song; see it in people's faces. Praise God through Christ.

Mandala by this time was getting quite carried away with himself, and with eyes nearly popping out of his head, he told our Silent Faces that next year he would not only be in the Private Members' section - no he would be running a horse too.

'Yes, I will buy a horse and watch it win,' he said confidently.

Thinking it all a great joke, I asked him, 'What will you call the horse, Mandala?'

Mandala Umballa the great beer salesman answered in a hypnotic tone, 'I will call it White Dawn,' then as if to protect himself he folded his arms just like the great Indian chief Sitting Bull.

'Why the name White Dawn?' I asked him.

'I tell you, Silent Face, just before I come over to your country, I meet this woman, who stays in a big house at the top of the hill, near to where I stay. And one day she say to me: "Mandala, before you go to the West come and see me tomorrow in the white dawn." '

Mandala Umballa the African-Indian man, who now sells beer all over the world, slapped his thighs and laughed a wild laugh, as if indicating he knew all about the wonder world, where bodily sense is second only to the rhythm of love.

Brian and I looked at each other: for the big African-Indian man had painted a strange dream on a dark landscape, with a

woman calling to him to come to her in the white dawn. Mandala, although not directly looking at our Silent Faces, noticed this, and he quickly added to the story, 'I tell you, Silent Faces, she was some baby,' and he opened his big dark eyes wide, as if to reveal all his thoughts about a strange woman in a strange land in a white dawn.

Brian eager to know more about the big beautiful baby asked Mandala earnestly, 'What age is she?'

Mandala, I think knew, but he never said, he just cheekily replied, 'I never ask her, Silent Face.'

Brian nodded and I think got ready to try again; however the big African-Indian beer salesman, broke into narrative, 'Oh, I tell you, Silent Face, she is one of the richest women in Africa. She does not work. She paints in the morning and lies all day out in the sun. I tell you, the woman lives like a queen.'

After slapping his thighs and laughing, I could see any thoughts of any Wrong-ones had completely disappeared from his mind, and so I took this opportunity to quiz him about the mad scheme he was embarked upon. 'Mandala why are you betting horses to win a bride?'

'I tell you, Silent Face, I will win all five races here today,' he replied sharply, and he looked at me as if he was about to quote the bard: For nothing can seem foul to those that win. (Shakespeare: Henry 1V)

Mandala, did not add anything else at this point as to why he had fallen in love, or indeed why he had come to this racetrack to gamble all the money he had made in his beer business on winning a bride.

As we all walked back towards the betting ring, I noticed that our African-Indian friend had slipped into a sleepy kind of protective mood, as if preparing himself for the next race. It was at this point that I wondered to myself: 'How does he pick his horses. Is it by numbers? Does he throw them up into the air, and let them tumble cardinal and ordinal in his mind, then grab one?'

Or does he just drift in and out of consciousness, until a voice speaks to him - Mandala pick that one.'

Mandala did not seem to know much about horses themselves. But there was something really fascinating about him. He was born to throw the dice, to chase the cause to the end.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Silent Faces all believe that material things are ultimately worthless. Certainly, you should look after what you have got; but money and what it can bring - be it a horse, a house, a boat, or a bike - should never get in the way of the light of truth.

Maybe our African-Indian friend was just homesick, and this was the reason for the madness. Who knows? 'Are you missing your friends and family?' I asked the big handsome beer salesman.

This question seemed to startle him, and after a long look at my Silent Face, Mandala Umballa changed the subject, 'I tell you, Silent Face, you would love Africa, it is a magical place,' then after a look here and there he added, 'and if you ever go there you will be entertained by the good people, and the only thing they will ask you to do is to tell them a story about the place you come from.'

'Yes, come on, Lawrence, what will you tell the good folks back in Africa?' said my Silent Face friend, as he gently nudged me in the ribs.

'Well,' I said, and paused for a moment to think about it. 'If I go I will tell them about a strange people in the days of my Silent Face, who call themselves The Mad Consumer People, and how they rush around the shops buying everything up in the hope that it will bring them happiness and perfection.'

Brian laughed then echoed my thoughts, 'Oh, The Mad Consumer People - keep clear of them.'

Mandala thought the story strange, and even though he said that they had Mad Consumer People back in Africa, he eventually agreed that it had all started in the West.

Keeping on the subject of the Dark Continent, Mandala told us about the history of Nigeria, naming Obatala and Oduduwa as early gods. Then he jumped many generations, and told us how in

the 1960's Nigeria achieved independence from Britain, and many other things that I did not know about his country.

'Yes, it is true Nigeria has the largest oil resources in Africa - not many Silent Faces know that,' he said, with a twinkle in his dark eyes.

Brian asked the big beer salesman if he had any sisters back home.

'I have got one sister in Africa, she is twenty-one, and very beautiful,' he said proudly.

Brian liked the sound of this, and asked Mandala if his beautiful sister had any plans to come over and see her beer-selling brother.

'She may come,' he replied in a cool manner, as he winked at me.

Brian, feeling an affirmative, suggested that if she did come, he was just the Silent Face to take her out and show her a good time.

Mandala told Brian in a serious tone, 'If she comes over to see me, I will introduce her to all my friends, and she can decide who takes her out.'

'Oh, sure, sure,' Brian repeated, quite embarrassed.

I must say Mandala was good with questions. He was aware not only of what was being said, but also what lay behind the questions. I think he understood what could be reported to others, in the Silent scene.

Brian, always the friend of strangers, after this invited the African-Indian man to join him for a meal next week at his parents house. 'Listen, Mandala my man, do you fancy a meal at my place next week. My mum's a great cook, you know.'

The African-Indian man smiled, at my Silent Face friend, and to show his appreciation he said gently, 'Yes, that would be nice.'

So Brian fixed a time, and a date, for next Friday, and one look from my Silent Face friend told me that I would be coming along too. Just in case Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman, had special tastes, as far as food went, Brian indicated what he

thought would be on the menu that night: 'It will probably be steak and lots of vegetables,' he said, with a huge smile on his handsome face.

Mandala smiled back at my Silent Face friend, as if seeing the table already set out in front of them, 'Good, very good,' he said in a hearty voice.

Brian shook his hand, then cried, 'That's my man!'

Mandala promised that he would bring along some beer, and with a wink he suggested that it would be strong stuff too.

Light rain started to fall once more, and as the umbrellas all went up all over the course we got ready for the second race. What sorts of things went through the big beer salesman's mind before a race I cannot say; but as he stood in front of me in the betting ring, checking the horses' names in his morning paper, I can tell you that the bookmakers all around him gave thanks for fools, and for the philosophy of fools.

Board prices for the second race were now on show all over the course, and the men in white gloves were starting to relay the information by tick-tack, as to where the money was going - it really was quite a scene. Almost forgetting what was at stake, I joked with Mandala saying, 'It's really a simple thing, isn't it, all you have to do is pick a winner, and win - just like the last time.'

Brian in a silent look told me to lay off him: 'This means a lot to the big man,' was the magic of his silent words.

The bookmakers came from all over the country for the Fair meeting, and above their heads they put their names and fancy signs. Next to me Adam Smith from London was standing on what looked like an orange box. He was shouting: '100-30, 4-1 11-2, 7-1, 9-1!' and some of the names, I noticed, rhymed with some of the prices like: Burlington Bertie, one hundred to thirty.

As I looked up at his board prices, I read the name Country Boy, and being from the country myself, my mind was made up. 'Yes, that's the one for me. That's how easy it is,' I thought to myself, but then again I was not backing horses to win a bride.

The second race was over the distance of a mile and two furlongs, and should be off in approximately two minutes forty-five

seconds. Now those of you who know about horse racing will know that eight runners allows each way betting; and when I had weighed everything up, I felt that Country Boy sounded a good each way bet, 'Yes, that's the one for me,' I repeated.

Brian, who at this point was looking up at Mr Smith's betting board, asked me in a doubting tone to confirm my thoughts. 'Are you sure Lawrence?'

A man apparently on his way up to place his bet on the Tote overheard our conversation, and he stopped to tell our Silent Faces that Country Boy was trained by someone in Ireland. 'And he is wearing blinkers for the first time today,' said the man in a serious tone.

My Silent Face stared at his rough-and-tumble face, 'Is that right,' I said, as if surprised.

In a rough Scottish voice, he added, 'Mind you, he's got on his back a good jockey - world famous in fact.' Then he paused and after some reflection appended, 'Although for some reason the jockey has never won on this course, but I think today's the day to put that right.' The man coughed, then looked at Brian and said, 'What do you think, Silent Face?'

Brian, however, liked the name, Wired to the Moon, and even though it was a rank outsider at fifty-to-one, he assured himself in an optimistic voice, 'It could very well be a winner, you know.' Mandala, not faraway, stared at his morning paper as if hypnotised by signs and wonders that accorded with a superstitious soul; however after a time he folded his paper back into a perfect square, and placed it back into one of his perfect patchwork pockets of his long leather coat.

Mandala, as he walked towards the man at the far end of the betting ring, mumbled to himself, 'I will do it - Mandala he will win.'

The words seemed to make him strange, and everyone looked at him as he walked through the race crowd.

When he was out off sight, I said to my Silent Face friend Brian, 'Listen mate if your horse, Wired to the Moon, wins, and

the big African-Indian beer salesman is not on it - I think he will go loony,' and we both laughed.

After placing our bets our Silent Faces moved away from the betting ring in the direction of the winning line, and when we got there the horses thundered by us making their way up to the starting stalls and everyone cheered.

Brian, imitated the MindMad man he had come across earlier on, as the horse Wired to the Moon went up to the starting stalls, 'Go on yah beauty!' he shouted.

It wasn't long after this that the man with the well-educated voice announced to everyone: 'THEY'RE OFF!' and once more his silky tones kept us in touch with the figures that were far out in the distance.

When it came to the run in it was clear to everyone that out of eight runners only two horses had a chance to win. The man with the well-educated voice shouted: 'Well, there well inside the final furlong and it's Bombay Duck, neck and neck with the favourite Transcontinental, they are two lengths clear of Mouldy Figs, back in third, then comes Texas Tommy, Country Boy, Old Black Joe, Fall Guy, and finally Wired to the Moon!'

The people in the stands and along the rails all cheered when the horses came up the straight. In fact, the loud noise from the crowd cut off the well-educated man's voice from my ears.

As the horses crossed the winning line, I looked back towards the stands, and suddenly Mandala Umballa appeared. He started dancing and waving the winning ticket high into the air, 'I bet the jolly favourite, Silent Faces! Good old Transcontinental!' he shouted, as he danced around me.

However, just then the man with the well-educated voice came over the sound system and announced in a sombre tone: 'STEWARDS INQUIRY.'

Mandala Umballa stopped dancing and looked at my Silent Face. 'What is this?'

'What does it mean, Stewards Inquiry?'

‘Someone has objected to someone else in the race,’ I said to Mandala, then I added quickly, ‘but it may have nothing to do with the winner.’

Although the African-Indian beer salesman listened to me, he gazed over at the big building by the paddock with dark passionate eyes. He stared as if the men in there did not realise that they were dealing with the destiny of a man and his betrothed.

Some of the punters around the betting ring started to argue with each other about what was happening: ‘It was the jockey on Old black Joe who interfered with Texas Tommy,’ said a man next to Mandala.

Mandala looked at me and I could see the big African-Indian beer salesman still did not understand. Presently, he headed towards the man he called his ‘good bookie,’ to see if he had any news on the outcome of the second race.

‘I’d better get a hold of him,’ said my Silent Face friend, and after about two laps of the betting ring Brian managed to calm him down, ‘Come on Mandala, let’s have a coffee, and we will see what happens.’

Brian bought the drinks at a stall next to the oyster bar, and it wasn’t long after this that the man with the well-educated voice came over the racetrack sound system, and announced the result of the stewards’ inquiry: ‘RESULT STANDS.’

After the announcement loud cheers went up from all over the course. Mandala looked at our Silent Faces not knowing what was happening.

‘Did he win, Silent Faces?’

‘Did the favourite win?’

When I said he had, the big African-Indian man started to dance the winning dance again, crying out loud that he the great beer salesman would win all five races, ‘I tell you Mandala, he will do it...’

Mandala trilled a sound like oweeeeee, and then he waved the winning ticket high into the air, as he danced around us. Needless to say Brian, my Silent Face friend, joined in with his

shuffling dance thing - even though Wired to the Moon was still last.

So the big beer salesman, born in India and who had moved to Africa, had won the first two races, and the dream was still very much on to win a bride. The Silent Faces may not have backed a winner yet, but we were having a great time, and the hope was that if we managed to catch a winner - between the two of us - it would pay for our day out. You must understand Silent Faces rarely gamble. They say, in the Silent scene, figures are only relative to an impression, and an impression is only relative to an illusion. The most important thing for us is that we enjoy ourselves, and have a good day out.

‘Where’s Mandala?’ I asked Brian.

‘He’s gone to get paid out,’ replied my Silent Face friend placidly.

When the big handsome turf dilettante came back, he showed us the money he had won, ‘Look, Silent Faces, thousands of pounds!’

Mandala stuffed the money back into one of his patchwork pockets of his long leather coat, and as he looked about him he said with a smile on his face, ‘Right, I will buy the beer.’

Inside a little bar by the paddock, where the men sat drinking beer and reading racing papers, the big African-Indian man walked straight up to the bar and slapped some money down on the counter. Then he demanded to know from the woman behind the bar if she sold some fancy named foreign beer.

The pleasant woman of motherly looks and worldly ways looked at him for a second or two, then she glanced at some of the men, who were sitting around the bar on stools, ‘No, I’m sorry sir, we don’t sell that foreign rubbish here,’ she said calmly.

The bar woman, I could see knew a thing or two about how to speak to customers and, after the laughter had died down, she told the big African-Indian beer salesman what type of beer she sold in the little cafe bar by the paddock. After mentioning about half a dozen well known brands, she added, ‘This is a good seller,’ and she held up the fancy bottle in front of his eyes.

Mandala, a little embarrassed, repeated, 'Ah, this is a good one.'

Presently, we all moved over to the window that looked out on to the paddock, and there we sat until the big African-Indian man found the key to break the silence.

'I tell you, Silent Faces, I know this girl who sleeps all day, and who dances all night, and when she sees me coming into the club at night, she runs over to me and she starts to kiss me. One time, I ask her: "Who is the man you come in here with every week?" and do you know what she say to me?'

Brian quickly said, 'No.'

Mandala answered, 'She say to me, "Oh, that is only my husband," ' then the African-Indian man screamed, 'I tell you, Silent Faces, she is crazy.'

When the great beer salesman had finished speaking, I asked him what in the world had made him think about a crazy nightclub girl at the racecourse.

'Oh, I thought I saw her go by the window just now with her husband,' said a cool Mandala Umballa.

And as Mandala directed my eyes towards a couple walking away from the paddock, he winked at Brian and said with a twinkle in his eye, 'But it was not her - this I know - for she will still be sleeping.'

Word soon got round the course that a pickpocket was about, and had picked the pocket of a fat gambling man. The fat gambling man - now without his wallet - just happened to be standing outside the cafe window, and was giving some details of the theft to a young constable.

The young constable was looking at him in a strange way, 'Now sir, tell me again when did you last see your wallet.'

'It's not the wallet, or the money that is in it, that is bothering me!' cried the fat gambling man. 'No, it is the winning ticket for the last race!'

As he stared at my Silent Face through the cafe window, the young constable nodded and tried to understand the conflicting emotions of one who had just won, then lost again.

The young constable reassured the fat gambling man that he would radio for help, 'Yes, there will be someone on the case right away, sir. And we will try and catch the thief who has stolen the wallet that contains the winning ticket.'

Just then the wee chap in the working class bunnet, that we had come across earlier on, walked by the fat gambling man and the young constable. The wee chap looked at the two of them, then he staggered into the little cafe bar by the paddock.

Someone at the bar spotted the wee chap in the working class bunnet, then a man at the bar next to him turned to his mate and reported to him that Wee Tam the poet had just arrived back from collecting his winnings, and that they would probably be getting another poem from him soon - and if they were lucky maybe even another drink.

And right enough at the cafe bar, a mate of his asked Wee Tam for another tragic fragment, and of course another whisky to help him understand it. Wee Tam waved a paper note about, that had the head of Charles Dickens on it, then he shouted at the barmaid, 'Another two whiskies, pet!'

We thought the people in the little cafe bar by the paddock strange and wonderful, and my Silent Face watched them for a while. I noticed that when someone said that there would never be another poet like Robert Burns in this land again, all the men at the bar agreed.

Mandala asked me who they were talking about. I pointed in the direction of Alloway where the poet was born. And when I said the name Robert Burns, Mandala murmured something to himself and looked towards the area. The African-Indian man, after a moment or two, sighed as if he just recovered a lost thought. Then he said in broken English, 'Ah, Burns we got him at school.'

When I finished telling the big beer salesman all I knew about the poet, a man behind me, who was smoking a pipe turned round. He croaked in a cultured tone, 'Yes, that's right, Silent Face, Rabbie was born there in the year 1759, a man of his time, he was known by rich and poor alike.'

5 Third Race

Around the parade ring walked seven horses for the third race, first there was: Tickety-boo, then next came, Alphabet of Winks, Creoles of Colour, Another Century, Femme Fatale, Fallen Star, and finally the favourite Dangerous.

As I sat down beside an old lady near the parade ring, I wondered to myself, 'Now can you pick a winner just by looking at them?'

My Silent Face friend, and Mandala, also found seats not all that faraway from me, and when I looked round at them I noticed the two of them had buried their heads into Mandala's morning paper. They didn't seem to take much interest in the parading horses in the paddock.

When I looked back from them I noticed Alphabet of Winks pass by, and the first impression I got was that it slavered too much to be a winner. Behind the filly of letters came the white face of a Fallen Star, and I thought to myself, 'Not bad, but you're no oil painting, and a winner is always attractive in some way or other - is it not?'

Creoles of Colour looked rather clumsy, and Femme Fatale, who was wearing blinkers for the first time, was throwing her head about as if trying to see where she was going. Another Century

didn't look ready for the race; however, the next horse to pass, Dangerous, looked good, 'Yes, there is something about this horse, something mean, unpredictable - adventurous.'

I made my mind up quickly: 'Dangerous to win - yes, that's the one for me.'

'No chance, Lawrence!' shouted my Silent Face friend, from two stools down. And Brian, even though the horse was a gelding, added, 'She looks like a bit of a madam to me.'

Just then, the old woman who sat next to me turned round and looked at my Silent Face. We had interrupted her concentration. After a few moments had passed, I thought I had better say something to her, lest she thought we were trying to annoy her: 'Are you having a good day at the races?' I said in a kind voice.

The old woman looked at me and smiled that she understood. Then she brought out a racecard from a large brown bag, and placed it on top of the little plastic rail in front of her. After a second or two she brought out another card, that I noticed had some strange signs on it. Presently, she placed it beside the racecard.

'What is the card for?' I asked, as I pointed at the strange signs.

The old woman said gently, 'Well, you see, Silent Face, this here is the sign of the fish, and when I place the fish sign next to a horse's name it tells me that the horse likes plenty of rain on the ground before it is ready to win. The next sign is the sign of a circle, and when I place the circle sign next to a horse's name it tells me that the horse can run on any ground and on any track.'

The old lady of the signs paused at this point and looked at the list of runners in the racecard for the third race. Then she lifted her ballpoint pen and pointed it at the sign of the bowler hat, and then to a horse's name.

'Now the bowler hat lets me know that the horse is the oldest in the race. This information is always worth knowing because some of the older horses can still be very good. And lastly to the fire sign, for when I place the fire sign next to a horse's name it

tells me that it is erratic and unpredictable. These are some of the signs that try and help me pick a winner, Silent Face.'

She told me the signs had been passed onto her from her mother, who at one time had been a fortune-teller with a travelling Gypsy show. Just before her mother had died she had revealed to her the secret of the signs.

At that moment, the old woman looked at the horse Dangerous, that was passing by in the parade ring, and I noticed that she placed the sign of a circle next to its name.

Two seats down from her the great beer salesman, Mandala Umballa, watched the old woman of the signs closely and, after a few more signs were placed next to a few more horses' names, the big African-Indian beer salesman came over to get a better look at what was going on. 'I see you like the signs, lady,' he said teasingly, as he looked over her shoulder.

The old lady of the signs did not look up at him: for at that moment Tickety-boo went by her again, and poor old Tickety-boo got the bowler hat treatment.

The big African-Indian beer salesman seeing the old woman busy, did not say anything else and, as he walked back to his seat, he whispered to Brian, 'I tell you, Silent Face, Tickety-boo, has got no chance - he is too old.'

The next piece of theatre came in the shape of a large American tourist. The tourist dressed in a safari suit had a camera swinging around his neck. When he noticed my Silent Face gazing at him, he came running over towards me, and when he saw Brian, he shouted, 'Oh, gee whiz, it's the Silent Faces!'

And before I knew it the camera was out of its case, and the large American tourist was taking pictures of our Silent Faces. 'Just wait till the folks back home see this,' he said, as he moved from one side to the other, as if trying to get a better angle.

Mandala looked at both our Silent Faces, and then he started to laugh. The old woman of the signs finished marking her card and got ready to leave.

'Hey mam, do you know that just last week I was in your capital, and I managed to get a picture of your Queen, as she

came out of her palace in a limousine,' said the large American tourist, as he looked at the old lady.

As if to say, 'Very good,' the old woman of the signs nodded to him, then she got off her stool and stared at the rattling machine gun in the safari suit.

The American tourist then started to go on about the way Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales, were so different, 'I got to tell you...'

The old woman of the signs made a face at me as if to say, 'Thank God, I'm going.'

The American tourist held out his hand to me, then hollered, 'By the way my name is Tex.'

Tex did not stay for very long, but in the time he did, he confabulated as if language was a thing you got out of the high street, and the strange thing about it was that after every question he would say: 'Yea, yea,' then repeat another, 'yea, yea,' after that. It was as if he wanted to show us that he knew the answer to every one of his questions. I guess they must have been written on the packet in the high street store; anyway the perpetual questions with the, 'Yea, yea,' after them had such a strange effect on me that I had to quickly reassure myself that language, no matter from what country, was like a mirror where the truth is in the words, yea, yea.

'I got to go and see a buddy of mine in the Private Members' section, 'Yea, yea,' said Tex, and after a few more, 'Yea, yea's,' he raced away from us towards the main stand.

Brian, as Tex hurried away, said that the globetrotting rubbernecking man should have been a racehorse. Mandala Umballa laughed and said that he would put money on him, 'He is fast - just look at him go.'

For some odd reason instead of looking at the horses going around in the parade ring, I found myself staring up at the blue sky where dark clouds seemed to be gathering to swallow up a plane, as it made its way like a white hot missile towards its destination. And to share this sense of wonder with me, I looked at my Silent Face friend, and as the plane came out of the clouds, I

directed his gaze towards it. 'Man can fly above the clouds, but cannot conquer his own land,' I said to my Silent Face friend, as a deep sense of wonder filled me.

Mandala Umballa smiled when he heard me say this and he nudged Brian in the ribs. Then he mimicked the mid-Atlantic voice of Tex the American tourist, by saying, 'This is Silent philosophy, yea, yea.'

Seeing they were having a little go at me, I gave them some more Silent philosophy to think about: 'They are not all that sure what it is that keeps planes up there, you know?' and for pure effect I looked skyward, again.

'No,' replied Brian, who looked at Mandala as if to warn him. 'Watch it, Lawrence is getting clever.'

'No, according to a leading American technologist all explanations given so far have misunderstood what it is that makes planes fly, and that includes Einstein's theory on the subject,' I replied.

Both my friends looked completely baffled so after a pause, I added, 'No, up until now we were led to believe that planes fly only because of something to do with the force of air being faster over the wing than under it: a basic law known as Bernoulli's theorem.'

I could see Brian and Mandala were looking a little more serious now, so I went onto tell them more about the article I had read in the Sunday newspaper last week.

However, just as I was telling them about the camber effect, the big African-Indian beer salesman interrupted me, and said with eyes staring at the sky, 'Maybe the plane up there is on its way to India or Africa; I hope, Silent Face, whatever it is that makes it fly keeps it going.'

The fun seemed to end when the jockeys mounted their horses, and made their way out onto the course. 'We had better get our bets on,' I said, knowing how quickly time can fly before a race.

So back at the betting ring once more our Silent Faces wandered around, and sometimes we would glance up at the

bookmakers' boards, half-hidden under colourful umbrellas, and at the bookmakers' faces. Meanwhile, Mandala searched for the man he called his good bookie, and when the big beer salesman saw him, he turned to me, and in a secret voice Mandala said, 'I've got to go Silent Face - I will see you later.'

As we wandered our Silent Faces looked for the best prices and, after what seemed an endless parade around the betting ring, we stopped at the open air establishment of Mr Wm. Falkner from Dundee. Wm. Falkner was busy shouting: 5-2, 3-1, 7-2, 9-2, 5-1, 10-1 bar; however he stopped for a moment to look at us, 'Right, Silent Faces, fancy a flutter?' he said in an adventurous tone.

'Dangerous to win,' I told him, and handed him the money I wanted to bet.

Mr Falkner took the money and said something to someone beside him. The man beside him marked something down in a large ledger book, and then he gave me a colourful ticket with the number 502 printed on it.

The action was so easy that it made me wonder if this is what is meant in the Silent scene as transparent coping, used by the Being Being People (existentialist thinkers). They are forever saying, 'Nothing is real or new, in life. Life is just about Being Being - that's all it is.'

After placing my bet, I wondered to myself about the Being Being people: 'Are they really all just free agents in a seemingly meaningless universe?'

I tried to engage my Silent Face friend on this topic, but he didn't seem interested. A few minutes later, however, I asked him what he had bet.

'Creoles of Colour,' replied a confident Silent Face.

All my Silent Face friends, in the Silent scene, say that it's not the winning that is important, but it is playing the game that is; Brian I am sure had this in mind when he showed his ticket to me. He said boldly, 'That's the winning ticket, Lawrence. I have got a good feeling about this one.'

Mandala Umballa, by this time, had also placed his bet, and he was now standing under the main stand, not faraway from the Ticktack Bar.

When we got down to the winning line our Silent Faces settled into the little crowd, and not long after this the man with the well-educated voice shouted through every speaker on the course: 'THEY'RE OFF!' and the third race got under way.

Presently, all the punters watched as the colourful little carriage, way out in the distance, slowly moved away from the starting stalls on the far side of the course - leaving only one blue and white carriage adrift.

'I hope that's not Creoles of Colour,' said a worried Silent Face, next to me.

As the horses came round and into the straight the man with the well-educated voice got quite excited again, and he shouted: 'Well, they all have a chance except for the back marker Creoles of Colour - who is now being pulled up.'

'Oh, no!' shouted Brian, who covered his eyes with his hand.

Following the numbers on the jockeys' backs, I watched the horse, Dangerous, come through on the rails and take the lead. 'Go on Dangerous!' I shouted.

As they went by the post, with all the wild shouts going on around me, it was a wonder I heard the result:

'Dangerous wins, second is...'

In the melee two Japanese men nearby were arguing with each other. The man who had just won was looking happy, and he was telling the other man in his best Japanese-English accent that he should have listened to him, 'Oh, you should have backed Dangerous.' Then after a second or two he added, 'You no listen to me - you no win.'

The Japanese man who had lost started giving his horse Alphabet of Winks dogs abuse, 'I tell you Alphabet of Winks, he no racehorse, he a donkey.'

As the two foreign faces walked away from the rails, still arguing with each other, another foreign face appeared. This face was indeed a happy face. The African-Indian beer salesman

grabbed Brian's arm and he started to dance with him, 'Dangerous, I got it, Silent Face. I backed the jolly favourite!'

After the celebration we all headed towards the paddock to greet the winning jockey and horse.

'Look Dangerous is showing off,' I said to Brian, and I pointed at the silly thing, as it made its way into the winner's enclosure.

In the little crowd that was following the horse, I spotted the old woman of the signs, and she waved over to me through the cheering crowd. She seemed very happy indeed. The old system of the signs had not let her down, right enough.

So the old woman, Mandala, and me, and many more, all headed in the direction of the betting ring to get paid out. When we got there, I can report to you that Mr Wm. Falkner from Dundee, was not transparently coping with winning hands. His face was positively grey as if reflecting a worried soul: 'Oh, dearie me, what if they keep on winning and I keep on losing. I'll be out of business, before the end of the week.'

After I had collected my winnings, Brian drew my attention to the far end of the betting ring where our African-Indian friend was bending down. He was stuffing what looked like thousands of pounds into a green carrier bag.

'I wonder how much he has won?' said an unbelieving, Silent Face, next to me.

As our astonished Silent Faces stared at him, trying to figure out what was going on, word soon got round the course that a tall African-Indian man, dressed in a long leather coat had won a fortune on the third race. Someone close by said, 'Apparently, the man is threatening to put the lot on the next race, and if he wins, then he is going to put the lot on the last race.'

'He must be mad,' said his friend, who quickly added that he had seen the foreign man in the Ticktack Bar.

His mate, however, had a little more information as regards the reason for the madness: 'They say he's in love with some bird, and she has told him that if he buys her a big house and keeps her in the style she is accustomed to - she will marry him. So the big

dandy has come to the racetrack today with all the money from his beer selling business to back horses in search of a bride.'

Another man standing in the betting ring, I recognised from the Ticktack Bar, laughed then replied in a voice full of irony, 'He's got no chance of winning every race.'

When Mandala Umballa came over to where we were standing, he lifted up a green plastic carrier bag full of money. Then he smiled at our Silent Faces, saying, 'I have got so much money, Silent Faces, I could not put it all in me pockets.'

I was quick to impress upon him the hidden dangers of fame and fortune, and gave him a few examples of men who had staked everything on something and won nothing.

'Yea, come on Mandala you've won enough money by now - it's time to quit,' was the advice from my Silent Face friend Brian.

But unfortunately, Brian's words made no impression on the big African-Indian beer salesman.

A few moments later, with excitement in his voice, the big beer salesman declared his intentions, 'I tell you, Silent Faces, Mandala is on a lucky streak, and he has only two races to go.'

The madness of his words made a strange impression on my silent thoughts, and it led me to wonder if he could do it. 'Can he really win all the races?' I uttered to myself.

Isn't it strange that after every high comes a low: for as we stood not all that faraway from the entrance to the Ticktack Bar, our great enemies in the Silent scene, the Wrong-ones, appeared on the scene once again.

The Poger stretched out a tattooed arm from behind the black man, and tried to snatch the green plastic bag from him. Mandala quickly came to his senses and, when he knew what was happening, he drew the plastic bag to his chest like a goalkeeper saving a fine shot. The African-Indian man then stared at the Poger, and just for a moment I thought there was going to be a fight.

'Oh, don't worry Sambo it's only a bit of fun,' was what the Poger said to him, in typical Wrong-one fashion. And after a look over his shoulder the Poger stared at him, 'Me and the boys here

have been hearing that you've been getting lucky,' he added in a strange tone.

Another Wrong-one butted in and said through rotting teeth, 'Yea, how much did you win, anyway?'

Seeing the need for an answer to this question the Poger rejoined 'Yea, that's right, how much did you win, Sambo?'

The Wrong-ones then went onto discuss the African-Indian man's upbringing, his parents, his personal habits, and what kind of people he associated with, when he was at home, and when he was abroad. The Wrong-ones, as you can see, are a horrible lot.

Thankfully, a bookmaker dressed in a loud check suit, puffing on a short fat cigar, working close by came over and told the Wrong-ones to get lost, or else he would have them ejected from the racecourse. As the Wrong-ones started to slink away, the bookmaker declared, 'They would have your shirt off your back, that lot.'

Brian thanked the nice man, then we all moved smartly away from the scene - where they could have been easily a crime committed - and we went and stood inside the main building just opposite the little cloakroom.

In the middle of the queue I noticed a young Arab lady, dressed in smart western clothes, waiting patiently to hand her bag in. The young Arab lady, I noticed had a wonderful way of watching the world around her without being intrusive or awkward with it in any way - a rare quality in the days of my Silent Face. When she glanced at me, and I at her, we both inhabited each other's world, and the magic of an ever knowing second seemed to tell us everything about each other. As I smiled at her, I said, 'Well, it's not every day you win.'

'You won?' replied the young Arab lady in a happy voice.

I was just about to tell her all about our day out at the races: how we had met Mandala Umballa, the man who has come to the racecourse to back horses to win a bride, and about the old woman who follows the strange signs, and about the fortune-telling Gypsy girls, however just then the cloakroom attendant, with the little red nose and sleeveless pullover (who incidentally had still not

finished the Telegraph crossword) took her bag, and he asked her, 'Now is there anything else I can help you with, madam.'

'No, that's fine,' replied the young Arab lady.

The young Arab lady then took her ticket, and turned back to me and started talking again. She had lost her friend Donald at the racetrack. And as she stood beside me patiently waiting for him to appear, I watched her eyes watch the world around her, and again I became fascinated by the fact that she never seemed to lose a thought from a filtered image in front of her.

To get to know the young Arab lady a little better I kept the conversation going by talking to her about horses, 'What a great sport horse racing is - don't you think,' I said. Then I went on, 'But I cannot help wondering why horse racing is a sport inside a business, when it seems obvious to me that if the state ran it everyone would be better off, just as they do in Arabia.'

The young Arab lady was a little surprised by this statement, and after a long hard look at me, she touched the side of my Silent Face and said, 'I can see many questions in your eyes. Are you a philosopher?'

Mandala, who was standing next to Brian, started to laugh. Then I overheard him say to my Silent Face friend, 'The young Arab lady has found out Lawrence is a philosopher,' then the two of them started laughing again.

To add to the fun this bold but shy Silent Face stretched out his hand and touched the side of the young Arab lady's face, and said to her, 'And you are a doctor working in an important hospital in Glasgow.'

'How did you know that!' cried the young Arab lady completely taken aback, as if I had just stolen her mind.

I would have liked to continue with the fun, but I could see the young Arab lady was starting to get a bit worried, so I had to admit to her that I noticed her name and title on her bag when she handed it in at the little cloakroom.

'Silent Faces never miss a thing,' I said with a smile.

Completely fascinated by a foreign face I nearly forgot to introduce my two friends to her. When I turned round to look at

them, I noticed that they both had incredulous looks on their faces. 'Oh, this is Brian, my Silent Face friend, and this is Mandala Umballa an African-Indian man,' I said rushing to introduce them.

The young Arab lady first of all shook the hand of my Silent Face friend, then she turned to Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman, in the long leather coat.

'Yes, I am Mandala Umballa, the great beer salesman,' he said, to her as if being introduced to royalty.

The young Arab lady made a face, and with gentle words she let it be known that she understood the reason why Mandala had left his home: for was she too not working on foreign soil.

By this time her friend Donald had still not turned up so, seeing the situation and knowing that it could be a few more minutes before he may appear, I suggested to her, 'Let's go over to the paddock, and see if he is there.'

Brian asked her, 'What is he like?'

'He's about this height,' said the young Arab lady, and she held her hand up to indicate a height of around five foot eight.

After a moment or two she added in a soft charming voice, 'He is dressed in casual clothes, and has mousy brown hair that is short and brushed in a side shed.'

As we walked over towards the paddock, I assured her that if he was at the racecourse today we would find him. Thousands of miles between people, brought up in different places, coloured my mind and made me think of asking her all kinds of questions in search of all sorts of answers.

However, as we walked along, the first question I asked her was: 'Is it true that the Holy Book the Koran says that *so many grains of barley as thou givest thy horse, so many sins shall be forgiven thee?*'

The young Arab lady nodded that this was true.

'And is it also true that the Evil One dares not enter a tent in which a pure-bred horse is kept.'

The young Arab lady once again assured me: 'This is true, Silent Face.'

Seeing how completely fascinated by it all I was, the young Arab lady suggested that I should go and visit the land where religion was born and see for myself what it is like. But she also gave me a warning, 'The desert, Silent Face, has more secrets than can ever be told, and those who try to conquer it - usually disappear.'

Seeing how charming she was I smiled and replied, 'I think you should be known as a princess from a prophet's land.'

Brian never one to be quiet for long said that he had heard that the Arabs had not only a great understanding of horses, and religion, but of life in general. In typical fashion my Silent Face friend Brian said that no matter who was at the forefront of things to come in the future be it: Arab, Jew, or Gentile, the next generation would do away with material things, and live in a wonderful world full of music.

The young Arab lady laughed, then she balanced everything by saying diplomatically, 'I'm sure the next generation will squander just as much as any other,' then she cursed the evil one who is behind all thoughtless and careless actions.

I agreed and looked at my Silent Face friend telling him to get his act together. For some reason after this we all started talking about money and how the method of payment was starting to change. Brian thought that soon our government would do away with coins and notes altogether, and we would become a credit creation nation. The main objection to this movement seemed to be the lack of control you would have over your own affairs: 'A pound in your hand is worth more than a thousand credit cards lying inside one of those broken down machines,' someone once said to me in the Silent scene.

You see there was a movement going around who liked the idea of having no currency. In the Silent scene they are called Credit Creation Plastic people: for they do not like to pass on money. They use their plastic credit wherever they go. The C.C.P. like to see everything marked down on an invoice.

The young Arab lady understood the two different points of view, regarding how we trade and how we pay for it. She also

agreed with me when I said that new technology should not take over our lives.

Laughing I added, 'Falling in love with credit machines and screens is just plain daft. Leave that to the People of the Shining Glass Experience.'

After this the Young Arab lady told me that in her life so far she had travelled to many places, but that she liked Scotland the best.

'The people are so friendly,' she said with a wonderful smile.

The young Arab Lady then offered me, from her bag, dates from Siwa, 'Alexander the Great went there once,' she said laughing, 'eat them and you too will be a great man, Lawrence.'

I had never been to her land, but I had read just a few weeks ago a book titled *Arabian Sands* by a man called Thesiger: a story of how a western man had lived and travelled with the Bedu people in and around an area called the Empty Quarter.

As I was talking about the book, I suddenly remembered a passage from it, and I told it to my friend, the young Arab lady, at the racetrack: 'The incident happened one night when they were all camping out near a place called Mughshin; Thesiger heard a long drawn howl, and it sent shivers down his back. A young Bedu lad had been possessed by an evil spirit (zar), and under the strange moonlight the writer witnessed how the Bedu chase evil spirits away. As the lad howled his Bedu family and friends all gathered round him and chanted, in two parts, line for line, a song until the evil spirit went away - isn't that fantastic!' I cried, as I recalled the pictures fresh from the pages of my mind.

Brian liked the story and, full of *joie de vivre*, he turned to the young Arab lady and told her: 'When some of our friends in the Silent scene feel down - or are in trouble - we do the same thing.'

The young Arab lady smiled at him, then she laughed.

'It's true we all start singing one of our favourite songs and, in no time at all, they are back up on their feet and dancing again,' said Brian with a huge grin on his big daft face.

Going back to the book the young Arab lady asked me the name of the writer again, who had lived with the Bedu in Arabia,

and when I said the name Thesiger, the princess from a prophet's land sighed, 'Ah, Umbarak,' and in her dark desert eyes, I could see that she understood the reason why men, from the West, go to the desert and search for life.

The young Arab lady told me about the great Arab writers, and how her favourite was Naguib Mahfouz. 'Silent Face,' she said excitedly, 'you must read Palace Walk it is the first book in the Cairo trilogy. The novels take you back in time to 1917, and to the years leading up to the popular revolution of 1919, then through the next three generations, and you end up at 1944. It is the best modern Arab fiction ever written,' she declared, and transferred a glowing look to me, confirming that all the pages written by the writer had been read and enjoyed. 'Yes, it is a wonderful story.'

The young Arab lady must have noticed the interest in my eyes; for she paused for a moment, then she told me how the shopkeeper's son had to get married after a misdemeanour with the maid. Then she laughed as if finding a clue as to why books can make light of people's problems in life.

Feeling that it was relative to the discussion I told her that I had read *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, and I quoted my favourite passage to her: '*In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond.*'

And when I had finished speaking to her, the young Arab lady let the silence speak for a moment. Then she quoted her favourite passage back to me: '*You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.*'

After talking about books and writers from all over the world, she told me about her family, and in particular about her grandmother who had been a wonderful character.

'When I was young my grandmother used to tell me all about the world, and even though she no longer comes to ring the doorbell, long and loud, at our house, I still see her silent face, somewhere, helping me. Praise be to God for a wonderful grandmother.'

The young Arab lady also told me that her father had once told her that she had the sight of an eagle, and just to prove it, as

her dark Arab eyes wandered over the little crowd by the weigh-in room, she spotted her friend Donald in the middle of the crowd. 'Donald!' she shouted and waved.

Donald at first looked more lost than found; but he eventually came over towards us with an expression on his face that conveyed a feeling of someone caught halfway between joy and embarrassment.

'Where have you been?' asked the young Arab lady, in a bright, but serious tone.

Brian, the great shaker of hands from the Silent scene, introduced himself and, hearing that Donald had not picked a winner at the Fair meeting yet, he sympathised with him, 'Oh, don't worry about that, mate, I haven't either.'

Brian looked melancholy for a moment, then he added in a happy but sad voice, 'In fact, when I think about it - I don't think I'm the lucky type when it comes to gambling.'

Mandala Umballa certainly had been lucky. He had won the first three races, and Brian took great delight in telling the young Arab lady, and her friend Donald, all about what had happened so far: 'Yes, this is the man who has come to the racetrack to back horses to win a bride,' said Brian, and he put his arm around him.

Mandala nodded that every word spoken was true, and he said with a huge smile on his African-Indian face. 'It is true I have won the first three races, and if I win the next two I will indeed buy a big house for the woman I love, and she will marry me.'

'What do you mean?' asked the young Arab lady, as if what she had just heard was some kind of joke.

Mandala laughed and retold the story about how he had got up early this morning, went to the bank and withdrew all the money from his beer business. He told her how he had jumped on a train bound for the racecourse, and then he repeated how he planned to win enough money to buy a big house, so that the woman he loved would marry him.

'Yes, I am going to put all the money on the next race, and if it wins then all the money will go on the last race - it is a case of all or nothing,' Mandala stated quite calmly.

Silence followed this, then the young Arab lady turned to me, and she said in a voice that was not quite prepared to believe it, 'Is this true?'

Sadly, I had to confirm that it was and, as we all looked at the African-Indian man, Mandala Umballa stared faraway over at the little houses, fenced off by trees, in the countryside.

Presently, we all stood and listened to him repeat the now familiar cry, 'I tell you Mandala Umballa will win all five races, and marry the woman he loves.'

Turning towards the young Arab lady, I said, 'Yes, this is indeed a tale of how a man has come to the racetrack to win a bride,' and after a sigh, I acknowledged the fact, 'We have tried to dissuade him, but I'm afraid it has all been in vain.'

The young Arab lady then asked the African-Indian man: 'Do you know anything about horses?'

Mandala answered her slowly: 'No.'

'Do you have any inside information as to what is likely to win, then?'

Mandala said quickly: 'No.'

'What system do you follow?'

To the last question Mandala laughed and said: 'Me, I have no system lady, I just pick a name, that is all.'

However, the big African-Indian man did admit to her about some kind of fascination with horses' names. He said confidently: 'If I like the name and do not repeat it before the horse has raced - then it will win.'

Donald had a worried look on his face and, from an inside pocket of his white casual bomber jacket, he brought out a large racing form guide book, that I noticed had an italic headline on the front page: *A Good Rate of Success*; and with a shy smile he handed it to the handsome African-Indian man. In an apologetic tone Donald said, 'My mate at work gave me this last week when he heard that I was going to the races. Take it, the information may come in handy.'

But Mandala would not touch the book, and he showed him the palm of his hand like a policeman stopping traffic. Brian ever

the diplomat protected Mandala from any further embarrassment; he took the book from Donald saying, 'Yes, it's some book right enough...'

The young Arab lady at this point looked at the African-Indian man, and said something very interesting indeed: 'There is no animal as devious as a horse in God's kingdom - this I know. Then after a look into the African man's dark eyes, she added bluntly, 'So please do not ask me what name I think will win the next race - for the sake of a bride.'

So with these words the young Arab lady excused herself from the mad scheme. The young Arab lady in a quick glance then indicated to me that she thought it was a man's destiny to be alone while involved in romantic coups, and she moved away from him near to me. Standing next to me she said, 'This is crazy, Lawrence, he cannot win.'

It is worth pointing out to you at this point that a lot of Silent Faces, in the Silent scene, believe that the future is really made in the here and now, and that all our actions, by the grace of God, become reality in the future. So that is why I guess Brian and I tried once again to change the big beer salesman's mind, and stop him gambling on a horse to win a bride.

Mandala listened to us, but our words made absolutely no impression on him, and after a few minutes he smiled at our Silent Faces. Then he said, 'Listen, Silent Faces, I tell you Mandala - he will win.'

Donald worked as a porter in the same hospital as where the young Arab lady worked and, although shy in appearance, once he settled down he became good company and quite adept at moving from one topic to another.

Talking about the things that had happened to him at work, Donald said, 'You won't believe this one,' and as he put the form guide book away, he added in a quiet voice, 'there is this guy called Dave who works beside me in the laundry department at the hospital, and you know he bets on everything: football, rugby, horses, dogs, cricket, tennis; and one time I remember when all the sports events were off because of bad weather, he started betting

with another lad on the colour of the next piece of cloth that would come down the shoot for washing.'

Donald laughed at how gamblers had made their way into the hospital, then he smiled at the mad gambler, Mandala Umballa, who was standing close by listening to him.

There was plenty of time before the next race, so I suggested that we should all go for another coffee.

'Good idea,' said my Silent Face friend Brian.

And as we all made our way back over towards one of the little bars by the paddock, the young Arab Lady whispered to me in a low voice, 'This is not normal, Lawrence, I mean no one comes to the racecourse thinking that they can win all the races - do they?'

I was not sure about the merits of a man in search of a bride at a racetrack and, confounded by the whole thing, I just shook my head and said, 'It is very strange indeed.'

This strange situation, however, reminded the young Arab lady of a story her mother had once told her about a rich lady and a carpet maker, in a town not all that far from Jerusalem.

The young Arab lady began: 'My mother told me that, once upon a time, there was a rich woman who had her heart set on marrying a man who worked as a carpet maker in the local bazaar. Dressed in beautiful clothes the rich lady would visit him every day, and she would try and seduce him with offers to come to her house when he finished his work. However, the carpet maker man hardly took any notice of her. He would just reply and say that he was too busy, or else he would make some other excuse up like he had to visit a friend or relative: "Maybe some other time," he would say, to the rich lady when things got embarrassing. So frustrated and angry the rich lady one night went to the house of an old witch, and she asked the old witch to put a spell on the carpet maker man so that he would fall in love with her. After listening to the rich lady the old witch stood up and sang a song that had seemingly no meaning to the human ear. Then she told the rich lady to go at first light to the place where the carpet maker man worked, and to sing to him the song, that began with the

words: Zim Zannaouya. Just before the rich woman left her apartment the old witch warned the woman: "But if another woman hears the words from the song, and she looks into the eyes of the carpet maker man - it will be that woman who will marry him." After a time the old witch said goodbye to her with a warning in her voice: "Remember love is faster than the speed of light and deeper than every ocean, so be careful my dear." So following instructions the next day the rich woman left for the bazaar at first light. It was so early that she was the only figure in the district on the street. When she reached the shop of the carpet maker man she hid in a doorway, opposite the carpet shop, and waited for him to arrive. Patiently she kept watch.'

The young Arab lady paused, then she continued: 'Just as the golden sunlight flooded the land of milk and honey, the carpet maker man appeared. After opening up his shop as usual he wiped the dust from his shoes and then he went inside. The rich lady paused for a moment, then she too entered the shop. Once inside the shop, the rich woman stared around her, as if rehearsing the words from the song that she had been told to sing by the old woman. She could see the carpet maker man at the back of the shop. He was starting to work on a carpet bound for Kambeeze Street, Cairo. On the little table by the door the rich woman noticed flowers in a vase. She thought that when the time came she would smash them on the floor, and when the man turned round to look at her she would look into his eyes and sing the strange song the old witch had taught her to sing. Then he would fall in love with her. But as fate would have it when the time came and she smashed the vase on the floor, a pretty young lady - whose father worked in the shop next door to the carpet maker man - walked into the shop. The young lady wanted to ask the carpet maker man if he would help her father, who was old and lame, move something heavy from his cart into his store; and it was into that young woman's eyes the carpet maker man looked, as the strange incantation filled the air in the small shop, not all that far from Jerusalem. The rich woman cried, "Oh, no!" and she ran

screaming from the shop wailing that she would be in hell for the rest of her life.'

When the young Arab lady had finished the story about the rich woman and the carpet maker man she turned to me and, with a silent smile in her youthful dark eyes, she told me in a strange way how only love can break your heart, and somehow I grasped the fact that love and destiny are both independent and unaccountable, in a world where love will forever triumph over everything else.

Donald in fact had many Silent Face friends and he was curious to know if we - like them - would take off our robes sometimes and go out into society dressed in ordinary everyday clothes.

'Sometimes we do,' said Brian, who reflected for a moment. Then he added, 'It really depends upon the occasion.'

The young Arab lady had heard about Silent Faces long before she had come over to our country, but she still wanted to know how we got the name for our movement.

Brian left it to me to explain to her the meaning. So after thinking about it for a few seconds I said, 'Silent Face is a spiritual term used to describe how we see someone, or something, in space and time.'

When I noticed her a little baffled, I added quickly: 'Right focus on any silent face in the race crowd, then after a few moments look away.'

The young Arab lady looked faraway into the faces of the crowd, and I watched her eyes focus on a young man who was dressed in a light grey suit. She stared at him for a few moments. The young man was looking over at the paddock area where the horses were being put into trucks, not far from the large house. Then I added: 'Right well look at his face and when you look away, listen to your silent thoughts, and the impression you are left with should tell you something about him, or about his life. He himself at this moment in time may be thinking about some other silent face somewhere, and the impression given to him may be telling him something about his life, or about someone else's life:

Silent Faces are always helpful towards each other. We never interfere with good thoughts: for good thoughts make the world go round.'

The young Arab lady looked away from the man in the light grey suit and, even though the man she had looked at had no modern robe on, she smiled and said softly, 'I see.'

As we sat down at a table inside another little cafe bar by the paddock, the young Arab lady suggested that we should spend sometime playing a word game. Tapping the table she quickly explained the rules to us, 'I will put forward a letter that has something to do with a horse, and whoever gets it right, then that person puts forward another letter.' After looking at all our faces she cried, 'Right the first letter is G.'

Everyone had a go and after two or three tries, I said in a hopeful tone, 'Gaskin.' Then I put forward the letter S that Mandala got for 'Stocking', and he put forward H that Donald got for 'Hoof ', and so it went on till we all ran out of letters for words relating to horses.

Just then a group of Pearly people walked by the cafe window at the racetrack. Pearly people, they say in the Silent scene, are fashion victims who dress in way-out costumes.

When the Pearly people had sailed by, after showing off their expensive clothes and jewellery, Donald got a bit annoyed, 'Look at those deadheads,' he said, in an angry voice.

'Donald!' exclaimed the young Arab lady, quite shocked.

Pearly people, I guess must have been around in every age, but our fashion extremists never stop talking about material things. When they meet you on the street they always come right up to you and start talking about all the pretentious things in life that have no meaning. Here is a good example of a Pearly person talking to you: 'Oh, I'm just off to get my hair dyed, then I'm going to buy a complete range of autumn clothes from the designer Lou Emanuel, then I think I will go to the south of France for the winter, then back to the Caribbean for the summer...'

You must understand Pearly people above all things love to boast: for they love being talked about: ‘He wears silk shirts. She has got diamonds. He has got a penthouse in the city. They have just bought a place in America. Her jewels and clothes are from the finest designers from New York...’

They say, in the Silent scene, reputation is everything for Pearly people. Pearly people can only talk to their friends when they have got something to boast about. In fact, they stay indoors when they have nothing to talk about.

The young Arab lady thought them funny and once they were out of sight she smiled at me. Donald, however, mocked them once again, ‘I bet it’s hard work walking around the racetrack with all that jewellery on.’

I must admit the Pearly people that I have come across in life never look happy; they smile but it is a sad smile that hardly says anything to you. They seem to be constantly searching for something they know they will never find.

Looking out of the window and away from the people who they say put their trust in material things, I reflected on a biblical proverb:

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch. (Proverbs: 11,28)

Our conversation in the little cafe bar by the paddock, after the Pearly people had gone, turned to politics. It was amazing how in the twenty-first century we were still impressed by words like capitalism and socialism, and how at one time or another in life you had to reject one in favour of the other. I talked about my work as a union rep and told them how every day is an endless farrago of disputes and counterclaims. Thinking about some of the things that have happened in the work place, I told my friends, ‘In the days of my Silent Face everyone thinks they are being cheated by someone else. In fact, when I think about it that is the only thing a lot of them have in common.’

Everyone laughed, then the young Arab lady indicated that she had sympathy with me and, after asking me about my work, she said, 'I'm sure after a good day out at the races you will return to work ready to handle all the problems next week.'

Interestingly she told us that, among the intellectuals in the Middle East, there was a growing opinion that it would have been a different world today if the West had not imposed Western capitalism or socialism on the Arabs.

The young Arab lady laughed and said, 'It is still possible we may yet come up with a brand new political idea, that will benefit the world.'

6 Fourth Race

The trainers and their connections were starting to chat with each other in the middle of the parade ring, so we all hurried out of the little cafe bar by the paddock, and once more we stood around the parade ring.

‘Number seven looks good Congo Square,’ said Donald, like a mad gambler. And as he contorted his face he studied the animal that he was talking about. Then he added in an excited tone, ‘Just look at the shine on its coat.’

Donald, however, changed his mind after he had read his form book bible, ‘Oh, no! The horse has got no chance - it’s a ten year old who has not won all year.’

With a baffled expression on his face, Donald looked at the horse again, as if he would never again believe in the world of sense perception.

I am sure that if any bookmaker on the racetrack at that moment had been wondering: ‘Is there anyone out there today with a form book bible going to clean me out?’ he would now be relieved. ‘Yes, him over there, by the parade ring, reading the form book bible, bring him over here. We will give him a seat. We will give him a racing paper, and once he has settled down and feels comfortable we shall take all his money off him.’

Brian I think sensed this Silent scene, and it made me wonder if Donald would end up like the great beer salesman, and would one day come to the racetrack and throw away all his hard earned cash in search of some fantastic prize.

I asked the young Arab lady who she thought would win the class F selling stakes over five furlongs. She reminded me that her religion did not allow gambling - and anyway - she added with a smile, 'It is not the winning that is important, Silent Face, it is the taking part.'

Watching horses parade around is certainly fun, but we soon found ourselves wandering around the large marquee tents specially set up for the Fair meeting. Inside one of the tents I picked up an old paperback novel titled: *Champion Jockey* by John Deval, then I looked at some painted pictures of horses and famous jockeys.

'Yes, there is no painter dead or alive as good as George Stubbs,' said Donald, as he watched me pick up a print titled: *Mares and Foals*.

'He is very good, isn't he,' I said, appreciating the genius of a man who I knew had no equal in the study of horses and dogs.

Being on a racetrack for the first time Mandala Umballa was a little baffled as to why they had betting shops all over the course. So after we came out of the marquee tent, that sold and promoted painted pictures of the racing industry, we decided to visit a betting shop and find out what they were all about. Of course, the big beer salesman was not going to place his bet there; for someone, before he came to the racecourse, had already told him that he would get better odds every time in the betting ring

Not all that far from where the betting ring joins the Private Members' section, a strange thing happened. As the holiday crowds all poured into different parts of the course, we stood still for a moment to let some of the punters go by. Just then I saw a man who looked forty and far too big for his frame stop and talk to some of the punters. He told them that he thought the people who worked in the betting industry were no better than entrepreneurial

bandits. After shouting his mouth off he told the crowd in a loud and threatening voice, 'If I had my way I would shoot them all!'

The man who looked forty and far too big for his frame looked over towards the betting ring again, and he pointed an imaginary gun at some of the bookmakers.

Some of his mates started egging him on and soon the man, who looked forty and far too big for his frame, was shouting to everyone, 'I tell you, the next time I come to the racecourse, I am going to bring a real gun with me, and shoot the lot of them!'

This time, as he pointed an imaginary gun at one or two of the bookmakers, he shouted in a mad voice, 'Bloodsuckers, crooks, criminals!'

I noticed one or two bookmakers look at him and wonder to themselves if he would do it.

'What are the odds?'

'What is the probability?'

The bookmakers, I am sure, like everyone else, understood that sanity in this life is relative to unknown factors, and a man who has just lost all his money is apt to do crazy things. Donald mentioned to the young Arab lady that he thought the man who looked forty and far too big for his frame was joking. The young Arab lady said that she was glad; for she did not want to see a murder committed at the racetrack.

As I looked at the man in question, I said to her, 'Yes, you're right, fanaticism is a killer of all good things - even if it is an essential part of a self regulating earth.'

The young Arab lady nodded and said in a caring voice, 'It is a shame, I think he has lost all his money, poor man.'

As a crowd of people went by us, I tried to explain to her that no one can beat the bookie.

'They can't,' she said quite surprised.

'No, the odds are always in his favour,' I ended up saying.

The young Arab lady stared at the African-Indian man, in the long leather coat, as if asking for mercy for his gambling soul. Then through desert eyes she looked around at the people, and then to the spaces where the concrete and grass seemed to be mix

together, over on the far side of the course. The young Arab lady took the world inside her once more, as if knowing that it was only a colour change between the days of her childhood in Arabia, and the days now spent in a foreign land. As the faces of the crowd went slowly by her, she smiled and uttered to herself the Arabic word, '*harafish*,' as some of the wonderful everyday common people looked at her.

A few moments later the young Arab lady said, 'You know, Silent Face, I never change. I am always the same wherever I go.'

This I took to be a wonderful way of dealing with an unpredictable, erratic, modern world. I thought to myself, 'Yes, the Arabs, since the beginning of the world have had to move around because of political trouble. They must have had to deal with a changing world every day.'

Thankfully, the crowds dispersed and we all managed to move through to the main stand area, and find a spot not all that faraway from the Ticktack Bar. Sadly, it was here we said goodbye to Donald and the young Arab lady - not of course before exchanging addresses. Silent Faces always keep in touch: for they know what is written is true.

Inside one of the little betting shops under the main stand, I read the sports pages. The pages had all been pinned on to the walls. The headings predicted that the future would be rosy if only you followed this or that correspondent. I stood next to an attractive woman, dressed in a two-piece suit. The woman I could see was having difficulty filling in her betting slip.

'Can I help you?' I asked, as I picked up a little blue pen on the thin counter in front of me.

'After looking at my robe,' she said, 'Oh, Silent Face, I can never remember how to fill these things in.'

Taking a betting slip from a little container, off the wall, I proceeded to show her, 'Right, it is quite easy, you put the horse's name here, the time of the race and the course in this other section here, and below the horse's name put the amount you want to bet.' Then I told her something about the history of gambling: 'If you want you can also put your *nom de plume* somewhere; this

procedure goes back to a time when betting was illegal, and men would stand on street corners and collect bets. The *nom de plume* helped to identify who it was that was betting without revealing his or her name to the authorities - if caught.'

All over this little betting shop on the racecourse flashed constant information from every race meeting up and down the country. The most bizarre thing, if you like, was the way some of the punters would run two hundred yards, fresh from seeing horses in the parade ring, and stare at them on television screens; some of them, I have even heard it said, rarely venture outside to look at the real world. They are of course the extreme worshippers of the Shining Glass Experience.

Right in the middle of this little betting shop also stood the great African-Indian beer salesman. For a few moments Mandala Umballa listened to the people around him chat about what they thought would win the next race, at this or that price, in doubles, trebles, Trixies, and Tricast plus forecasts.

'The betting shop is doing good business,' said Mandala, with a cheeky smile on his face, as he walked over towards me.

Then he excused himself by saying, 'I am going outside to see if I can see my good bookie, I like to keep an eye on him. I will see you later Silent Face.'

For some reason Brian wanted to stay a little longer inside the little betting shop, I think it had something to do with the attractive woman; for she was now standing next to him. Standing looking at the people rushing here and there inside the little betting shop, Brian said to me, 'They're absolutely fascinating places, don't you think, Lawrence.'

On the wall, behind my Silent Face friend, I noticed some information regarding last year's race, and when I pointed this information out to him, Brian in a casual voice turned round and read the name out loud of last year's winner, 'Jazz'n'Blue,' and then he said confidently, 'I would have backed that one, you know.'

As we stared at the newspaper on the wall, we both read the thoughts of someone who claimed to be the Punters Pal. However, just then a famous man came into the betting shop. Famous people

in the days of my Silent Face tend to be sports people, politicians, singers, or criminals. This chap had been a footballer, and I noticed the race, the four o'clock selling stakes at Folkestone, he wanted to bet on was due off any second. With no idea of form, fact, or for that matter anything else, I watched him pick up a blue betting slip and scribble the word favourite down. Then he ran to a window where a betting shop worker sat and, as he approached her, he shouted as if his life depended on it, 'Hold the horses at Folkestone!'

Brian watched him, then he said to me, 'How do they get into such a state?'

'Maybe they have all read Tennyson,' I replied. '*For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see, Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be.*'

The famous footballer, after placing his bet, ran back to the counter picked up another blue slip, looked at a television screen, wrote something down, then ran to another window, shouting, 'Hold the horses at Chester...'

Brian did not seem convinced that horse racing punters were well-read, and he soon forgot all about the subject, and said to me, 'Lawrence, I think we should place our bets this time in the little betting shop and see how we get on.'

My Silent Face friend then turned round again and read the wall-to-wall information sheets in the little bookmaker's shop on the course, and we both wondered if we would find a winner there. So once again it was back to looking for clues for winners for the Silent Faces: Victory Blue, I read had been brought from Ireland for the fourth race, and certainly was not outclassed - well so the Man on the Spot said in the morning paper.

'Okay I'll go with Victory Blue,' I declared, and searched for a little blue betting slip to write its name on it.

Brian, I could see was writing out his line as well. He printed the name Felicity's Friend, and signed his *nom de plume* as Mista Cool, and when he had finished he assured me that the combination of friendship and *savoir-faire* was a success story in the making.

‘This is the one, Lawrence, just you wait and see.’

I noticed a father and son, who were also having a flutter on the fourth race; they were standing in front of us in the queue. The father, a tall man with a face full of temporal concerns, was instructing his son out of the side of his mouth about the evil ways of gambling, ‘When it gets into your soul son, it’s time to chuck it,’ he said, and he directed the lad’s eyes towards the famous ex footballer who was still running around the betting shop as mad as a hatter, shouting, ‘Stop the horses at Redcar, I want to back the favourite!’

This tragic scene made my Silent Face friend think about our African-Indian friend: ‘Lawrence it maybe better, you know, if the big beer salesman loses the next race; can you imagine if he wins it, and all the money goes on the last race and the horse gets beat by a short head. If that happens, I think he will go out and shoot himself.’

Brian gave me a wild look as if to acknowledge the unbelievable things that can happen in the days of our Silent Faces. When we left the betting shop, I noticed that outside in the betting ring the professional gamblers walked around as if they owned the place, while the holiday punters strolled around at times looking a little lost. The will to win, as far as the professional punters were concerned, had something to do with them not losing concentration. Information was coming from all over the course. Once they had taken everything on board they would make the right choice - yes, that’s what would make them rich men: information. The important data would surely come their way; it was only a case of waiting for it, watching for it, and above all listening out as regards where all the money was going to. Who was backing what?

In the betting ring outside on the course our good friend, Mandala Umballa, was no where to be seen; however as we approached the place of work of the man he called his good bookie, a man from under a colourful umbrella bent down and said to me in a coarse tone, ‘Listen, Silent Face, I’ll give you fifty to

one your cash that your big mate, the African-Indian beer salesman, does not back all the winners here today.'

The bookmaker next to him, a Mr Zimmerman from Cathcart, added, 'And I'll give you a hundred to one.'

Then the man next to him, Joe Stubbs from Coatbridge shouted, 'And I'll give you a thousand to one!' and everyone around the ring who heard them laughed.

Brian and I watched the fourth race from our usual spot down near the winning line, and once more the man with the well-educated voice kept us in touch with the figures far-out in the distance: 'Well, there pretty tightly bunched, and as they come round the final bend and into the straight, it's Congo Square, a length in front from Victory Blue, with Warning Shot back in third, then comes Hurry Harry, Sophisticated Lady, High Hat, Jilted Jane and finally Felicity's Friend...'

'Oh, no!' cried a disappointed Silent Face, seeing his horse two lengths off the pace.

'There well inside the final furlong and it's neck and neck between Warning Shot and Victory Blue, and as they go to the line Warning Shot just gets up and wins by a neck...'

'Hard luck Lawrence,' said Brian, as he watched my horse go by the post second.

Just after the man with the well-educated voice came over the course sound system confirming Warning Shot had won, at the generous odds of 4-1, out of the crowd came a dancing Mandala Umballa. 'I got it Silent Faces!' he shouted, as he jumped up and down and twirled around.

With big eyes staring he told our Silent Faces in an ecstatic voice, 'And now there is only one race to go and the woman I love will be mine.'

Brian the great shaker of hands from the Silent scene congratulated him. Then the big African-Indian man looked at him and suddenly his voice changed. Full of tension Mandala said, 'I will be okay, Silent Face, as long as I do not say the name of the horse before it runs, I will be okay - that is my secret.'

After this, for some reason, Mandala started talking to us about India, and then about Africa, and as I listened to him I could see quite clearly the places he was on about. Mandala said that he knew all the sandy roads in Africa that cut through the verdant land and ended up at the sea. However, after this, he warned us, 'But these plain and bright lands, where the Kikuyu and the Masia still live, are under threat, my friends. Yes, they are under threat from the mad consumer people in the West, and in the East.' Then he forgot about what he was saying and added, 'Yes, if I win I will take my bride to Africa, then after a month we will travel all the way to India and to the place where I was born: Simla, and I will show her how beautiful it all is.'

So from a beautiful African landscape we flew to India. Then Mandala switched the conversation back to the present. He started talking about problems that he said he could soon be facing, 'But the woman I love, her mother she no like me - I know this.'

Mandala paused, as if not wanting to continue, then he looked once more over towards the big house by the paddock and, as his eyes slowly came back, he changed the subject and said in a low tone, 'Listen, Silent Faces, I know I can trust you, when I come to your country I meet another girl and I promised to marry her.'

'What, there's another one!' cried Brian.

'Yes, you see, Silent Face, she used to come and clean my flat, and one day she stay too long, and the next morning I ask her to marry me - like any good African-Indian man would.'

Mandala laughed another wild laugh, then he got serious again, 'However, when I meet the beautiful rich girl, I fall in love with her.'

Trying to make light of the situation I suggested, 'It sounds as if you have just joined the bounders and cads club.'

Brian laughed, then he said to him in a firm but lighthearted tone, 'Take your time, Mandala, there is no need to hurry, remember women are just like kittens,' and the great shaker of hands from the Silent scene shook the African-Indian man's hand once more.

Mandala smiled at my Silent Face friend, and the two men who loved to talk about women stared at each other for a moment or two.

After being paid out by the man he called his good bookie Mandala Umballa rejoined us, and for the first time I noticed the big African-Indian man was nervous. 'One race to go,' he muttered to himself, and wiped some sweat from his brow.

Everyone around the course by this time wanted to know what was happening as regards the big African-Indian man. All the bookmakers in the betting ring were starting to talk about the big dandy in the long leather coat, and some of them were putting it about that Mandala may forget about the man he has come to know as 'his good bookie', and place his final bet with them.

But this was not true, for as Mandala Umballa stared at my Silent Face, he declared, 'No, when the time comes, Silent Face, I will write down the name of the horse and hand it to the good bookie.'

Great occasions demand that people close to them take their part, so I suggested to Brian that we should all go for a drink in the little Ticktack Bar, and give the big man a good send-off before the last race. The Ticktack Bar was only half-full when we got there, but the atmosphere was electric. And as soon as we entered, someone shouted, 'Here he comes!'

Then someone else cried, 'There he is, that's him - that's the man who has cleaned out the bookies, and is going to put the lot on the last race for the sake of a bride!'

Mandala put the green plastic bag that was full of all the money he had won on top of the Ticktack Bar. People all around him started clapping and cheering and slapping him on the back.

'Go on, Mandala, you can do it.'

'Yea, you can beat the system.'

Mandala Umballa assured any doubters among the crowd that he, the great beer salesman born in India and who had moved to Africa, would win the last race, and buy a house for the woman he loved.

The big barman who was pouring a pint for another red-faced punter, looked over at us and, after giving the punter his change, he looked at Mandala as if to size him up. Then after he walked over to the left-hand side of the bar, to where we were standing, he stared at the African-Indian man. With a smile on his hard face the big barman gave Mandala a canny nod, 'This is it, big man, there is no going back now,' he said to him in a worldly way.

The wife of the big barman came over and, after saying how thrilled she was to hear about how much money he had won, she stared at the great beer salesman as if she would never live to see such a sight again. A few moments later she asked her husband, the big barman, in a quiet tone, 'Do you think he can win?'

The big barman picked up an empty tumbler from the Ticktack Bar and, after another worldly nod in the direction of his better half, he said, 'You are either a winner or a loser in life, sweetheart,' and he winked at her as if to tell her the answer.

As the big barman put the tumbler back down on top of the Ticktack Bar, he looked back at his wife again. He knew nothing could stop the big African-Indian man now from putting all his money on a horse to win a bride.

More and more people poured into the Ticktack Bar to catch a glimpse of the big beer salesman in the long leather coat. Just then a man who had lost all his money at the races came up to Mandala at the bar, and shook his hand, 'Good luck big fellow,' said the man, then he walked quietly away.

Mandala loved the attention and he smiled at me as he drank back his cool bottle of American beer. Then after lighting a cigarette he told me about how he was going to go dancing later tonight. A few moments later, however, he asked me a question regarding his private life: 'Lawrence, should I marry the rich woman or the woman who cleans my flat?'

Remembering all that had been said on the subject, I thought he should marry the woman who cleaned his flat: 'If you are a man of your word, that is, Mandala.'

The big African-Indian man was not ready for this, and after another mouthful of beer he turned away from me at the Ticktack Bar.

‘It’s unbelievable,’ said Brian totally freaked out, ‘I mean this is the stuff that appears in fiction.’

It certainly was unbelievable and I laughed to myself when I overheard Wullie - who was still inside the Ticktack Bar plotting the downfall of the bookmakers - whisper to his mate, ‘I hear someone has telephoned the local rag and they are sending a reporter and a photographer along.’

Just then a man at the bar, dressed in a loud check suit, not faraway from me, turned to his mate and said in an excited tone, ‘I’d better go and phone the wife. I told her earlier on that there was someone on the course trying to back horses to win a bride - and here he is with only one race to go.’

At this point, the big barman started joking with his wife, saying to her that if the big beer salesman did win the last race, he may very well invite them over to Africa for the wedding, ‘If that’s where it is going to be,’ conveyed a hopeful big barman.

Then Brian suggested to the big barman, ‘It may be in India; for he was born there, you know.’

His wife was not moved by the idea; she still wanted to go on a world cruise. However, she did wonder about the outcome of the last race, and what the position of her husband would be if the African-Indian man lost the race: ‘Will you be going to his funeral if the horse gets beat, and he goes out and hangs himself,’ said the worldly wife of the big barman.

The big barman got annoyed when he heard her say this, and he retorted, ‘Ah, don’t talk rubbish.’

But his wife hit back: ‘More gamblers commit suicide than any other group in society - you should know that.’

Some of the younger gamblers in the Ticktack Bar, just then, started chanting, ‘Here we go, here we go, here we go!’

Mandala puffed on his cigarette and looked over at them. Then he said in a cool voice, ‘I see the boys are getting excited.’

No one needed to look at their watch, for everyone knew the time was fast approaching for the last race: a race where a handsome African-Indian man would put all his money, that he had won today, on a horse, and if it won he was going to buy a house for the woman he loved. Then ask her to marry him.

‘I wonder, Lawrence, can he do it?’ whispered my Silent Face friend, before finishing his beer.

Mandala must have felt the full impact of the situation; for he quickly looked away and stared into the gantry mirror behind the Ticktack Bar. And if mirrors can tell you anything about faces, I would say the African-Indian man started to drift between the highs and lows of winning and losing, and the crazy maze that runs between them.

Mandala looked at the champagne bottle in the ice bucket that the big barman had placed on top of the Ticktack Bar. Then the African-Indian man took a last draw on his cigarette, and the next thing I knew was, thud went the bottle of American beer down on top of the Ticktack Bar. It was now all or nothing. The invisible point of no return had been past. He looked at his winnings on top of the Ticktack Bar inside the green carrier bag. Then he grabbed them off the bar.

‘Mandala Umballa will win!’ he said to himself in a mad tone.

‘Good luck!’ shouted the big barman, who bent over the bar to shake his hand.

‘Yea, go on big man, clean the bookies out!’ shouted another friendly voice, from somewhere inside the Ticktack Bar.

Brian started to shuffle dance as if it would help the big African-Indian man relax. Just as Mandala left the Ticktack Bar, a young journalist, and a photographer, arrived from the local rag, and when they spotted the big African-Indian man on his way out of the bar - heading in the direction of the betting ring - they ran over towards him. The young men who were standing around the Ticktack Bar sensed the occasion, and started singing again: ‘On you go, on you go, on you go, on you go!’ and everyone cheered.

Brian pulled my arm and said, 'Come on, Lawrence, let's follow the big man outside.'

However, there were now so many punters standing in the doorway outside the Ticktack Bar, waiting to catch a glimpse of the big handsome man in the long leather coat, that no one could get out of the bar.

Suddenly, Mandala got pushed against the wall of the Ticktack Bar, and somehow the young keen journalist from the local rag managed to get close to him. The young journalist shouted against the noise, 'Please sir, can we have a quote for the local paper, before you place your last bet. Do you think you can win all the races here today?'

The African-Indian man stared at the young lad, 'Yes, I am ready,' then he added haughtily, 'Mandala, he will win.'

'What are you backing?' asked the young reporter.

To this question came no reply and, as the crowds slowly drifted outside, for the last time Mandala Umballa slowly walked out of the Ticktack Bar like a prize fighter on his way to a world title fight.

7 Final Race

Granville King the bookmaker from Edinburgh was the first man to mark up starting prices for the final race, and this is how his board looked, after he had finished writing on it: Lady Luck, 3-1, La Viticulture, 4-1, Travel Tricks 9-2, Beirut Bomber 5-1, Danger Dance, 5-1, Bunny Hug, 7-1, Calamity's Friend 8-1.

Trying to fit my words into the mood of the moment, I turned to Brian and said, 'So there we have it, seven three year old horses, that will run five furlongs, for twelve thousand pounds; and the outcome of this race will determine the fate of our friend Mandala Umballa, the man who wants to buy a big house for the woman he loves.'

Brian nodded and after shaking his head, he said, 'Yea, that's it Lawrence. There is no going back now.'

In the middle of the betting ring as he walked around Mandala Umballa looked up at the horses' names on the bookmakers boards, and he stopped for a moment, not far from where we were standing. My Silent Face watched him take out a cigarette from a packet he kept in one of his fancy patchwork pockets. After he lit the cigarette with an old-fashioned petrol lighter, Mandala stood there looking at the bookmakers' boards as if he did not have a care in the world.

Brian wondered if we should place a bet on the final race but, with all this excitement going on, I really didn't see the point.

Looking up at the name on the bookmaker's board, Calamity's Friend, I wondered to myself, 'What if he does win? Will the big beer salesman head for the city tonight, and in the morning forget all about the woman, and the house he wants to buy for her? Will it seem as if it had all been a dream, or will he go to her with his cash in hand and buy her a mansion? Then one day when they are old and grey, will he tell her the story about how he went to the racetrack, met a couple of Silent Faces, and won the jackpot: "I did it for you sweetheart..."'

My Silent Face friend, Brian, got quite excited and he started doing the shuffle dance again, as if trying to help the big beer salesman pick a winner and win the last race. Brian, as he danced, sang the words to himself from the Absolute Zeroes song, Back in Chains.

Presently, the crowds all started moving in on the bookmakers, and once again money started changing hands for colourful tickets. The seven horses were already behind the starting stalls, and I thought that it wouldn't be all that long before the man with the well-educated voice came over the racecourse sound system for the last time today.

Mandala looked from the starting stalls all the way back down towards the winning line and, after he had stubbed his cigarette out with a large brown brogue, he mumbled something to himself about having to get his money on soon, 'I must find the good bookie.'

Quite calmly Mandala walked round the betting ring for the last time looking for the man he called his good bookie, and as he wandered all the bookmakers watched him.

Granville King grumbled to one of his workers, 'I wonder who he is going to place his bet with this time,' then he shouted out the price of the favourite: 'Lady Luck, three to one!'

I thought it best if we go down to our usual spot, down near the winning line and leave the big beer salesman to do his own thing. However, before walking away, I saw him approach the man

he called his good bookie, and write the name of the horse down for the last race on a piece of paper. Then I watched him hand over the green carrier bag that was full of all the money he had won.

Just as the good bookie looked at the name on the piece of paper, the man with the well-educated voice came over the racecourse sound system and shouted: 'THEY'RE OFF!' and our Silent Faces ran down to the rails knowing that everything was now on a horse to win a bride.

Down at the winning line I looked back to see if I could spot the big African-Indian man's face in the crowd - but I could not see him. Soon the horses approached the final furlong pole, and it was obvious that the winner was either going to be Lady Luck, or the grey La Viticulture.

Was the big African-Indian man on Lady Luck? Or had someone in his beer trade mentioned something to him about vine growing, or did he remember the name from school where he had no doubt learnt French?

The man with the well-educated voice tried to make the commentary as exciting as possible, but with only one hundred yards to go Lady Luck was in no real danger of losing the final race. 'And as they come up to the line it's Lady Luck who wins it, from in second, La Viticulture, then Travel Tricks back in third...'

I looked round hoping to see a happy dancing Mandala Umballa, but he was nowhere to be seen.

'Surely out of all the horses' names he would have picked Lady Luck,' said my Silent Face friend Brian, as he looked for him in the crowd.

'I hope so,' I replied anxiously.

After the horses had weighed-in the professional punters along with the holiday makers all made their way towards the exit signs situated under the stands. So the Fair meeting was over for another year. Some folks had won, and some folks had lost. In a strange sort of way it was funny to see all those beaten colourful tickets discarded all over the place. It was as if all the punters were

trying to cover up a cold and grey concrete world - and leave it like that - till they all came back again next year.

Brian looked again back towards the course to where Lady Luck had a few moments ago won, and my Silent Face friend sighed, 'It doesn't look good for him, Lawrence.'

I had to agree, for after every other race Mandala had appeared on the scene, jumping up-and-down, shouting: 'I got it Silent Face...'

'Yes, every time, when I turned round from watching the horses go by the post, he was always there jumping up and down - but not this time,' I muttered to Brian.

Brian thought it best if we headed back across towards the main stand, and make our way home: 'Yea, come on Lawrence, let's go.'

When we entered the betting ring one of the bookmakers situated at the front said, 'I don't think your big mate has won this time.'

I noticed that all the bookmakers were packing up and getting ready to leave, and surprisingly no one else said anything to us as we walked through the betting ring towards the main stand. However, just as we entered the main building my Silent Face friend, Brian, spotted our African-Indian friend. He was leaning up against a wall crying.

'Mandala!' I shouted, and we immediately ran towards him.

'I have lost everything Silent Faces,' he sobbed before sinking to the ground.

After a few silent seconds, he looked up at me and repeated, 'I have lost everything, Silent Face. I have been so stupid. I have lost everything...'

Mandala paused, and as he stared down onto the ground into a black hole of despair, he told us the reason why his superstitious system had let him down: 'You remember the pretty woman I met in the bar?'

I thought for a moment, then replied, 'Yes, the one who came over to buy some drinks.'

‘Well, she say to me that she had a horse running in the last race called Lady Luck, remember?’

‘Yes.’

‘And I repeat the name - so therefore I could not back it.’

Brian too remembered the incident, and he said slowly, ‘That’s right.’

Mandala looked up and, in a low mechanical voice, he sobbed again, ‘My secret was that if I liked the name of a horse it would win, as long as I did not say it’s name out loud - it would win. I tell you, Silent Faces, superstition - it is a funny thing.’

I asked him, ‘What did you back in the last race, then?’

Mandala stared at me for a few seconds, then he cried out, as if against the will of fate, ‘Calamity’s friend!’

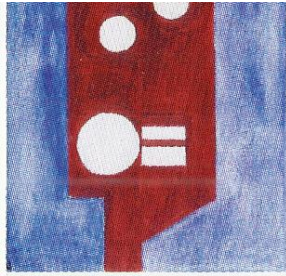
With a smile on his face, Brian helped him to his feet, ‘Come on get up, Mandalla.’

As the African Indian man put both his hands inside his fancy patchwork pockets of his long leather coat, he lamented three times, ‘I’m finished, I’m finished, I’m finished.’

In the Silent scene they say love is something simple, and that nothing gets in the way of it when you are honest with yourself, and this I told him. Looking into African-Indian eyes, I added, ‘Forget what money can bring, my friend.’

Mandala seemed to sense something in my words and, as he took his hands out of his fancy patchwork pockets of his long leather coat, he looked at some of the faces going out of the stadium.

Mercifully, when we were about to leave and go outside the racecourse something wonderful happened, Mandala smiled a beautiful smile, and as he glanced at my Silent Face, he said, ‘Material things are not what life is about, this I know; from now on I am going to focus on the good things in life. The Good Lord will guide me.’



Painting: Two Face by J.A. Walker

'So that is why I have come racing today with all the takings from my beer business; and I am going to put all the money on the first race, and if it wins then I will put all the money on the following race and so on till the end of the meeting.'



A fantastic visit to the seaside racetrack of Ayr, where you will meet many wonderful characters before and after lunch.



Silent Faces at the Races, well I admit it's different, but you must understand, Silent Faces are everywhere. Some in fact you may recognise in your mind's eye, when they say something to you, as they move about in the past, present or future.



'It is not the winning that is important, Silent Face, but the taking part.'

Music

<https://walkerjohna.wordpress.com/about/>

<https://youtu.be/GXqxNU2GSIU>